The Role of Public Speaking, Ridicule, and Play in Cultural Transmission among Mbendjele BaYaka Forest Hunter-gatherers

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I, Daša Bombjaková, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is based on ethnographic research conducted with Mbendjele BaYaka Pygmy hunter-gatherers of Likouala Region, Congo-Brazzaville for eighteen months from 2013 to 2015. The primary goals of this thesis are: (1) to present three key contexts for educating children about Mbendjele practices and values; (2) to analyse ethnographic observations of how these contexts are employed to distinguish the modes of education they exploit; (3) to contrast Mbendjele and outsider-imposed education methods, and how Mbendjele define proper and improper teaching and learning.

Mbendjele BaYaka value three main pro-egalitarian, cultural institutions as the primary means of educating children. They are based on public speaking, ridicule and play. I will examine how these institutions are employed in practice with a discussion of content and context. The results indicate that Mbendjele value mostly transmission of pro-egalitarian values, shaping understanding of gender and sexual roles in children, and teaching ways to deal with Non-Mbendjele outsiders. Corporal punishment is rare amongst egalitarian hunter-gatherers. Despite Mbendjele perceiving of it as an improper way of disciplining children, it is often employed in sedentarized context, in conjunction with increasing domestic violence and alcoholism.

Indigenous institutions for cultural reproduction are central to understanding how hunter-gatherer picture their own future. Despite good intentions foreign enforcement of institutional schooling can have negative affects on the cultural resilience of Mbendjele sociality and egalitarian values. Understanding how Mbendjele value outsider imposed and their indigenous education institutions contributes to a better understanding of cultural resilience among marginalised ethnic groups, such as Mbendjele.

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Orthography and Pronunciation

The employed glossing style follows *Leipzig Glossing Rules: Conventions for interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses* (Comrie et al. 2015). I was also inspired by socio-linguistic studies of (Y)Aka language (mainly Combettes & Tomassone 1978; Duke 2001; but also Thomas 1988; Thomas et al.eds 1993a, 1993b, 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005), and grammar of Bantu languages (Demuth 2000; Nurse 2008; Nurse & Philippsoneds 2003; Schroeder 2008). During the process of transcribing I was guided by professional linguist Benedikt Winkhart (2016, email communications, May-November).

List of Abbreviations

1PL	First Person Plural	FUT	Future
1SG	First Person Singular	GER	Gerund
2PL	Second Person Plural	IMP	Imperative
2SG	Second Person Singular	IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
3PL	Third Person Plural	LG	Lingala
3SG	Third Person Singular	MY	Mbendjee Yaka
CAUS	Causative	NEG	Negative
DEM	Demonstrative	ORA	Observer, Reflechir, Agir
BM	Bangui-Motaba	POSS	Possessive
DIST	Distal	PRF	Perfect
DISTR	Distributive	PROX	Proximal
DJ	Djoubé	PRS	Present
EMPH	Emphasis Marker	PST	Past
FR	French	RED	Reduplication
		SUBJ	Subjunctive

General Rules

- Original text appears on the first line, linguistic glossing on the second line, and English translation on the third line:

  original text
  glossing
  'English translation'

- A dash (**-**) represents a morpheme break.
- A dot (**.**) means that there is more than one morpheme, but they cannot be said apart.
- Every segment in the original text line is matched by one segment in the glossing line.
- If the translation consists of several words, those are glossed with a dot (**.**) in-between.

- If one English word is presented by two Mbendjee Yaka words, I use greater-than sign (**>**).
- No punctuation marks are used in the glossing line.
- English translation is marked with a set of single punctuation quotation marks: (**‘’**).

Yaka and Other Languages

Quotations of informants' natural speech are in three languages: Mbendjee Yaka, Lingala, and French. French examples follow the rules of written French. If an informant uses non-standard version of French words, I indicate the correct orthographic form in square brackets:

mostivation [motivation]
‘motivation'

For Mbendjee Yaka and Lingala I use IPA phonetic symbols. If Mbendjele informants employ French or Lingala words, I indicate it in the square brackets – **[FR]** for French, and **[LG]** for Lingala. Borrowed French words are written phonetically and the standard French word is indicated in square brackets after colon punctuation mark **[FR:French.word].** Borrowed Lingala words are also written phonetically, and in the glossing line I indicate its nominal noun class:

mì-ŋgwá	***dèʒà***
4-salt[LG:mungwa]	already[FR:déjà]
‘salt’	‘already'

Faunal and Floral Species

If informants refer to concrete names for faunal or floral species, I do not acknowledge that within glossing line. If identified, the name of the species is written in Latin in a footnote.

mè-lá
4-watery.yam
‘watery yams'[1]

[1] *Dioscoreophyllum cumminsii (STAPF) DIELS*

Mbendjee Yaka Pronouns

1SG	àmɛ́	I
1SG & 2SG	sínóɸɛ́	we (dual) inclusive
1SG & 3SG	sínáí	we (dual) exclusive

2SG	òɸɛ́, àɸɛ́	you
3SG	yɛ́	he, she, it
1PL	búsɛ́, búsí	we
1SG & 2PL	sínɛ́nú	we inclusive
1SG & 3PL	sínɛ́bó	we exclusive
2PL	búnɛ́	you
3PL	bɛ́nɛ́	they

Nominal class system

A Bantu noun class is a group of particular nouns – mostly semantic grouping, such as humans, animals, animates, inanimates, long things, round things – any such feature can be a characteristic of a certain noun class.

Table 1 Bantu nominal class prefixes

Some classes are entirely singular; some are entirely plural. A corresponding singular-plural pair makes a gender, like *mò-nà* (class 1) and *bá-nà* (class 2) in the table below. Thus, class 1 and 2 make a gender.

Class	Prefix	Example	Gloss	Translation
1	*mò-*	*mò-nà*	1-child	‘child’
	Ø-	*kòmbétì*	1.elder	‘elder’
2	*bà-*	*bá-nà*	2-child	‘children’
		bà-kòmbétì	2-elder	‘elders’
3	*mò-*	*mò-mbébéléké*	3-wrinkle	‘wrinkle’
	mù-	*mú-ɲòà*	3-mouth	‘mouth’
4	*mè*	*mè-mbébéléké*	4-wrinkle	‘wrinkles’
		mè-ɲòà	4-mouth	‘mouths’
5	*dì-*	*d-ísɔ̀*	5-eye	‘eye’
		dì-sòló	5-break	‘break/pause’
	[low voicing]	*gànɔ̀*	5.sung.fable	‘sung fable’
6	*mà-*	*m-ísɔ̀*	6-eye	‘eyes’
		mà-solo	6-break	‘breaks’
		mà-kànɔ̀	6-sung.fable	‘sung fables’
		mà-sɔ́pɔ́	6-earth	‘earths’
		mà-kíkí	6-eyebrow	‘eyebrows’
		mà-ɸúmà	6-home	‘homes’
7	*è-*	*è-kíkí*	7-eyebrow	‘eyebrow’
	ɛ̀-	*è-wésú*	7-bone	‘bone’
		ɛ̀-bɛ́bú	7-lower.lip	‘lower lip’
8	*bè-*	*bè-wésú*	8-bone	‘bones’
	bɛ̀-	*bè-bɛ́bú*	8-lower.lip	‘lower lips’
9	*Ø-*	*sɔ́pɔ́*	9.earth	‘earth’
		ɸúmà	9.home	‘home’
14	*bò-*	*bò-língó*	14-love	‘love’
		bò-mɔ́	14-fear	‘fear’
		bò-bínà	14-dance	‘dance’

Just like French has the two genders feminine and masculine, Yaka has genders like 1/2, 3/4, 5/6, 7/8, 3/5, 3/8 and 5/8, other gender pairings in Aka should be inchoate, meaning they hold only few exceptional cases. A noun class is defined by the according agreement class. The noun itself with its respective prefix is called head noun class, but a head noun class does not define a class without agreement. An agreement class is defined as the set of other words that take an according affix to mark grammatical agreement with the head noun. A perfect example of class agreement would be:

Bá*-nà*	***bà****-sɔ́nì*	***bà****-bálè*	***bà****-dìɛ́*	*ndɔ́.*
2-child	2-small	2-two	3PL-be.PRS	DEM.DIST
'Two small children are over there.'				

However, Mbendjee Yaka is exceptionally flexible in dropping head noun prefixes (Duke 2001). In that case the subject agreement marker on the verb is the only indication of the subject. The following example illustrates five different versions of the same phrase:

Òɸɛ́	*dìɛ́*	***mò****-tò*	***mò****-ɲìɛ̀.*
2SG	be.PRS	1-person	1-beautiful
Òɸɛ́	***ò****-dìɛ́*	***mò****-tò*	***mò****-ɲìɛ̀.*
2SG	2SG-be.PRS	1-person	1-beautiful
	Ò*-dìɛ́*	***mò****-tò*	***mò****-ɲìɛ̀.*
	2SG-be.PRS	1-person	1-beautiful
	Ò*-dìɛ́*	***mò****-ɲìɛ̀.*	
	2SG-be.PRS	1-beautiful	
Òɸɛ́		***mò****-ɲìɛ̀.*	
2SG		1-beautiful	
'You are a beautiful person.'			

Ideophones & Expletives

Given the complexity in distinguishing ideophones (or ideophonic adverbs) from expletives/interjections (Beck 2008; Dingemanse 2012; Kilian-Hatz 2006), I only provide lexical meanings of such expressions/sensations. One of the features of these sensations is *vowel lengthening* (Kilian-Hatz 1997). Thus, they can be stretched according to the speaker's liking. The flexibility in length is expressed by a tie, like in musical notation, indicating that it 'rings'. For example, the sensation of duration **"téééééééé"** is noted as "**tée͡é".**

tée͡é
sensation.of.duration
'for a long time'

These expressions can also be *reduplicated* to convey the meaning:

té-té-té-té

RED~sensation.of.duration
'for a long time'

Differences between Yaka in Bangui-Motaba and Djoubé[1]

There is regular loss of intervocalic /l/ in Bangui-Motaba

In the case of front vowels, a glide fills the position between the two vowels:

DJ		BM	
mbílà	>/l/ >glide>	mbíjà	palm seed
Míló	>/l/ >glide>	Míjó	Milo
ɛ̀kílà	>/l/ >glide>	ɛ̀kíjà	taboo

In the case of back vowels, /l/ is lost and subsequently the back vowel changes into a glide /w/.

DJ				BM	
ábòlé	>loss of /l/>	ábòé	>lenition of /o/>	ábwé	big
támbòlà	>loss of /l/>	támbòà >	>lenition of /o/>	támbwà	to walk
kéŋgòlà	>loss of /l/>	kéŋgòà	>lenition of /o/>	kéŋgwà	to look for

Pronunciation Guide

IPA Symbol	Description/Example
ɛ	dr**e**ss [drɛs]
ɸ	For English-speakers, it is easiest to think of the sound as an *f*-sound made only with the lips, instead of the upper teeth and lower lip, or a blowing sound.
ɔ	th**ough**t [θɔːt]
ɖ	**g**eese [gɪ̟i̟s] in Australian English
ʒ	vi**si**on [ˈvɪʒən]
dʒ	**j**am [dʒam]*
ŋ	si**ng** [sɪŋ]
ɲ	ma**gn**ifique
ʃ	**sh**ow [ʃəʊ]

* thus, the word '*Mbendjele'* should be ***"Mbéndʒélɛ́"*** However, for consistency I follow the tradition of Lewis (2oo2)

[1] I observed these differences in the field, Benedikt Winkhart helped me to describe it from the linguistic point of view.

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also mention *Àɸélà, Bɔ̀télé, Dʒèménì, Àndʒélé, Sɔ̀pɔ̀, Nìèlèké, Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá, Bɔ́kɔ́, Màbɔ́tà, Bɔ̀bílà*. Also children, with whom I shared lots of times of joy and play. Among many: *Kwɔ́nà, Àdiámbò, Àŋgàndá, Dʒàmbàndó, Sàmèdí, Mìsálá, Mbɔ́lɔ́, Kàkándʒì, Bémbà, and Ànísè.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Figure 1 *Bɔ́kɔ́* with his daughter *Bɛ́*

Kòmbɛ́tì	***à***	***ɸɔ́ɸá.***
1.elder	3SG	talk.PRS

'Elder talks.'

Mò-tò	***nà***	***mò-tò***	***nà***	***éndà***	***y-í.***
1-person	with	1-person	about	7.thing	7-DEM

'Person with person about this thing.'

Mò-tò	***nà***	***mò-tò***	***nà***	***éndà***	***yà***	***ndɔ́.***
1-person	with	1-person	about	7.thing	7.POSS	DEM.DIST

'Person with person about that thing.'

Kòmbɛ́tì	***ɸɔ́ɸá***	***bóná.***
1.elder	talk.PRS	like.that

'Elder talks like that.'

Kòmbɛ́tì	***ɸɔ́ɸá***	***mò-ndɔ́,***	***bà-tò***	***b-á***	***mbòká***	***bà***	***ɔ́kà.***
1.elder	talk.PRS	3-issue	2-person	2-POSS	5.village	3PL	listen.PRS

'Elder talks issue, people of his village listen.'

Bà-tò	***bà***	***ɔ́kà***	***bó***	***yɛ́***	***à***	***kàbá***	***ndɔ́.***
2-person	3PL	listen.PRS	that	3SG	3SG	share.PRS	DEM.DIST

‘People listen what he shares.’

Bà-tò	***bà***	***ɔ́kè***	***mè-ndɔ́***	***ndɔ́.***
2-person	3PL	listen.SUBJ	4-issue	DEM.DIST

‘People listen to those issues.’

Bá-nà	***bà***	***gàdìɛ́,***	***bá-nà***	***bà***	***gàdìɛ́,***
2-child	3PL	other	2-child	3PL	other

‘Other children, other children:’

Ɔ́kà!	***Ɔ́kà***	***mè-ndɔ́***	***ndɔ́!***
listen.IMP	listen.IMP	4-issue	DEM.DIST

Listen! You listen to the issues!’

Ɔ́kà	***mè-ndɔ́***	***m-ó***	***mò-sámbò!***
listen.IMP	4-issue	4-POSS	3-public.speaking

‘Listen issues of the mòsámbò.’

Ɔ́kà!	***Ɔ́kà!***	***Ɔ́kà!***	***Ɔ́kà!***
listen.IMP	listen.IMP	listen.IMP	listen.IMP

‘Listen! Listen! Listen! Listen!’

Bá-nà	***bà***	***dìɛ́***	***nà***	***mè-súkú***	***búdì!***
2-child	3PL	be.PRS	with	4-head	9.hardness

‘Children have unripe heads!’

Introducing Mbendjele BaYaka/Pygmies

Before explaining *Bɔ́kɔ́*'s words, I will introduce him. *Bɔ́kɔ́* comes from a village called Bangui-Motaba, situated in north-eastern Republic of Congo. In the picture, he is posing with his daughter *Bɛ́* – a long-awaited first child of *Bɔ́kɔ́* and his wife *Dʒíngò*. *Bɔ́kɔ́* is a proud Yaka man.

BaYaka (in plural) are hunter-gatherers of the Congo Basin. They are also known by the name "Pygmies". Recent studies estimate that there are as many as 920,000 Pygmies living in Central Africa (Olivero et al. 2016: 9) In general, there are four main Pygmy groups: The Western group (Gyeli, Bongo, Kola, Zimba, Aka, Baka), Eastern group – Mbuti (Efe, Asua, Sua, Kango), Twa group (Tua, Toa, Cwa, Boone, Langi, Chua) and the group of BaYaka. In Republic of Congo, there are several different Yaka groups: Aka, Luma, Mikaya, Ngombe, Baka, and Mbendjele (Köhler & Lewis 2002).

Literature-wise, Mbendjele were referred to by different names: People of the Forest, People of the spear, the Little people, People of the dance (Auteroche 1961: 22), Babinga (Bruel 1899; Hauser 1954), Yandingas (Douet 1914), Akowa, Akka (Schweinfurth 1874), Achua (Burrows 1898), Bibaya (Despois 1946) Biaka (Kisliuk 1998), Babenga (Regnault 1911), Bambenga, BaMbenzele, or Babenzele (Bahuchet 2012; Despois 1946).

Such as it is with many hunting and gathering societies (Ikeya & Ogawaeds 2009), all contemporary Yaka groups maintain relationships with "village-dwelling"(Köhler & Lewis 2002: 280) people. They were also called Negroes, Tall Blacks, farmers (Bahuchet & Guillaume 1982; Hattori 2014; Patin et al. 2009), Bantu (Ngima Mawoung 2001), the Village People (Turnbull 1961), cultivators (Kitanishi 1995) shifting cultivators (Hanawa 2004; Komatsu 1998), neighbours (Bonhomme et al. 2012), non-Pygmy neighbours (Joiris 1994, 2003), agricultural neighbours (Kitanishi 2003), neighbouring farmers (Matsuura 2011; Takeuchi 2005) or by the language they speak (Grinker 1990, 1994; Hattori 2006; Matsuura 2006; Rupp 2003; Yasuoka 2012).

Bɔ́kɔ́ normally refers to himself as Yaka, but to distinguish himself from other Pygmy groups, he calls himself Mbendjele. Yaka is an Mbendjele self-ascribed endonym, equivalent to "Pygmy" (Köhler & Lewis 2002). *Bɔ́kɔ́* refers to all the "village-dwelling"

Non-Pygmy Africans as Bilo (in singular Milo). Throughout this thesis I will follow *Bɔ́kɔ́'s* perception (also employed in the work of Kisliuk 2000; Lewis 2002; Noss 1995). This reflects an emic view that posits a radical cultural distinction between forest people (BaYaka) and village people (Bilo), firstly described by Turnbull (1976). By employing this distinction I avoid ascribing names that would refer to the people's modes of subsistence, language they speak, or whether they are "tall" (Köhler & Lewis 2002: 281). However, it does not necessarily mean that "the forest people" would spend most of their time in the forest and "the village people" most of their time in the village. As explained by Lewis:

> "[…] even where forest people no longer have access to forest, even where they speak the same language and have many cultural practices and beliefs similar to those of their farmer neighbours, these ethnic oppositions do not break down." (Lewis 2002: 53).

On Egalitarianism

There are three key cultural values and practices that influence lives of the Mbendjele: egalitarianism, demand sharing, and personal autonomy (Hewlett 2016: 2). Woodburn made the distinction of contemporary hunter-gatherer societies as immediate-return and delayed-return in respect to people's work effort which yields either immediate or delayed results (Woodburn 1982). While for example gathering is considered as immediate as it brings food ready for immediate consumption, farming is delayed, as the time must be spent in order to yield subsistence later. In Woodburn's terms, Mbendjele have an immediate-return economic system – they are present oriented and consume most of their production as soon as they produce it.

Immediate-return systems produce the: *"closest approximation to equality known in any human societies."* (Woodburn 1982: 431). Such societies are not egalitarian *"merely by default"* (Béteille 2010: 456). As Woodburn further puts it: *"The verbal rhetoric of equality may or may not be elaborated but actions speak loudly: equality is repeatedly acted out, publicly demonstrated, in opposition to possible inequality."* (Woodburn 1982: 432).

Egalitarianism permeates domains of gender, age, and politics (Barry S. Hewlett 2016b: 3). Mbendjele females are autonomous, have active political voice, participate in group's decision-making, are economically independent from males, have control over their sexual and reproductive bodies, and equal decision in marriage. Amongst the Mbendjele, menstruation is not considered as a sign of female inferiority, tendencies of which were argued elsewhere (Leacock 1978: 247).

Egalitarianism is not "sameness". While most of their days females engage in gendered, qualitatively different activities – these differences are not valued hierarchically. For instance, the activity of hunting is not considered as more valuable than gathering. As Endicott explained: *"There can be many differences in what men and women do in an egalitarian society. What makes it egalitarian is how the activities are controlled and culturally valued."* (Endicott 1981: 2).

While Mbendjele acknowledge the variations in skills and abilities of individuals, they impose egalitarian economic relations through actions that force them to share with anyone who asks. These actions lead to immediate consumption, and prevent accumulation and saving in Mbendjele society. Everyone has the right to demand material objects, and demand sharing is a key way to get material objects. Demand sharing is an institution of distribution and a tool for promoting egalitarianism. This distribution system is recipient controlled. It is the right of members of the group to demand and it is the obligation of donor to give (Lewis 2002; Peterson 1993). Demand sharing is not a simple form of reciprocity, but the *"means of both recognizing equality and achieving it."* (Lewis 2002: 237). Mbendjele also value personal autonomy, which means that noone can coerce others, or tell them what they should do, including children (Barry S. Hewlett 2016a: 2).

Thesis' Goal

Mbendjele egalitarianism shows remarkable persistence despite being surrounded by societies with hierarchical political systems and facing strong discrimination (Bouquiaux 2006; Dehoumon 2011; Lewis 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2014a; Moïse 2011; Woodburn 1997, 2005). According to Woodburn, egalitarianism of immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies persists for: *"number of reasons… but one of the major ones is*

certainly the fact that the systematic nature of their immediate-return institutions makes such a transition [from egalitarian to hierarchical] *very difficult for them to accomplish whatever their wishes."* (2002: 16).

This thesis contributes to understanding persistence of the Mbendjele society by a focus on cultural reproduction processes occurring through three Mbendjele social institutions. Social institutions are elements of a social system (Barnard 2004: 210) – e.g. bride service is an institution of kinship system, and *mòsámbò* mentioned by *Bɔ́kɔ́* above is an Mbendjele social institution of a political system (Lewis 2002: 76). While this thesis makes some contribution to our understanding of transmission of egalitarianism – its primary concern is cultural reproduction processes (also known as social learning).

A key aim of this thesis is to offer an *Mbendjele* account for this cultural persistence through a detailed examination of key cultural institutions such as *mòsámbò* that they see as crucial for transmitting key cultural values and knowledge down the generations. *Bɔ́kɔ́'s* quote above grasps the essential goal of this thesis: *How people ripen?* And *How do Mbendjele seek to promote 'ripening' of their children?* Before moving on to the discussion on how "ripening" sets *in* the wider literature, it is necessary to define it (see Table 2).

Table 2 Defining "ripening"

<table>
<tr><td colspan="5">Definition:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">human development;
maturing;
growing up;
transition from being immature to being mature
becoming more intelligent, "less hard", "fuller", "bigger", "sweeter", "redder"</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Informed by:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Key Cultural Values</td><td>Perceptions on ripeness / unripeness</td><td>Child-rearing beliefs & practices</td><td>"wisdom-sharing & taking" (teaching & learning)</td><td>Play</td></tr>
</table>

"Ripening" here could be interpreted as a gradual process of maturation, joyful development of both body and mind, which can be enhanced and encouraged by proper means of *wisdom-sharing/taking* and play. While ripening refers to human development

and maturation, wisdom sharing and wisdom taking could be interpreted as teaching and learning.

*

Before moving on to a further discussion of the main aims of this thesis, it is necessary to clarify what influenced the nature and scope of this thesis. During my Master Degree in social anthropology at Comenius University Bratislava, I was interested in understanding cultural transmission. By testing predictions of dual-inheritance theory, also known as gene-culture co-evolutionary theory (Boyd & Richerson 1988; Richerson & Boyd 2005), I examined how one's reputation is influenced by biased transmission of social information – gossip (Henrich & Gil-White 2001). The fieldwork took place in a Western society, in my own maternal tongue (Slovak), and with people of approximately my age – students.

When I began this PhD, I wanted to continue with something familiar, given the challenge of conducting fieldwork in foreign language, in a non-Western, egalitarian, and hunting-and-gathering society. This seemed as a promising idea, since before my departure to the field, there were only two publications concerning cultural transmission among Congo Pygmy hunter-gatherers: *"Cultural Transmission among Aka pygmies"* by Hewlett & Cavalli-Sforza (1986) and *"Social learning among Congo Basin hunter–gatherers"* (Hewlett et al. 2011a). Since then, however, the studies of cultural reproduction increased in popularity (Boyette & Hewlett 2017a; Gallois 2015; Gallois et al. 2017; Bonnie Lynn Hewlett 2013; Hewlett et al. 2011a, 2016, Sonoda 2014, 2016a, 2016b; Terashima & Hewletteds 2016).

This thesis' approach differs from these studies in two regards. Firstly, I present and describe *the Mbendjele metaphors* concerning social learning and cultural reproduction. Secondly, I explore how these metaphors are lived, experienced, and applied, through analysis of social learning within the context of Mbendjele cultural institutions – described by my informants as vital for Mbendjele cultural reproduction.

The following seeks to sow these "metaphors" and "lived experiences" into scholarly theoretical grounds, and present how these fields are bridged and inter-related for purposes of the analysis of "ripening", as hinted on by *Bɔ́kɔ́.*

On Language and Metaphors Herein

All "Pygmy" languages relate either to Niger-Kordofanian or Nilo-Saharan languages. According to Bahuchet (2006), Pygmy communities speak three languages that are not shared with their neighbours: the Bantu language Aka, the Ubangian language Baka, and the Central Sudanic language Asua. According to Guthrie's (1948) classification system of Bantu languages, Mbendjele speak "Aka" language, categorised as Bantu C10. Among linguists, there was a debate as to whether this language should be referred to as "Aka", or "Yaka", which arose from the fact that /y/ in "Yaka" is due a: *"phonological rule which inserts a glide where is no consonant onset to a syllable."* (Duke 2001: 10), as well as it reflects: *"regional accents and the popular tendency to drop consonants in normal speech."* (Köhler & Lewis 2002: 280).

Throughout this thesis, I use "Mbendjee Yaka" to refer to the language employed by my informants. The expressions of "Mbendjee" or "Yaka" were used interchangeably in reference to their language. By referring to this language as "Mbendjee Yaka", I avoid confusion with a different Bantu language known as "Yaka" B31, while remaining faithful to Mbendjele emic terms and to scholarly traditions at the same time ("Mbendjee" in the work of Lewis 2002, 2009; and "Yaka" in the works of Kosseke & Kutsch Lojenga 1996).

I heavily use transcriptions and transliterations of informants' expressions and metaphors. While language transcriptions can be useful in terms of portraying Mbendjele-specific style of communication, presenting its aesthetic quality, manifesting its diversity and richness, and enhancing possibilities for future comparative research – and these are of importance, too – my primary focus lies in presenting the *social meanings* of people's expressions, taking its linguistic and ethnographic features as unified, inseparable elements of analysis. This implies the importance not only of the words' meanings per se, but also how they are utilised, lived, and experienced within the context of people's everyday lives and in relation to and with one another and with the environment they live in.

Understanding meanings of Mbendjele expressions, as presented here, could not have been achieved solely by studying language in isolation from its social context, e.g. by studying "Aka" lexicon textbooks, or by "hunting and gathering" words' meanings

through explicit interviews, but only through a combination of these with a long-term body and mind participant observation, and shared, co-living experiences with the studied community.

Specifically, metaphors herein should *not* be viewed conventionally – as: *"exaggerated, embellished and exotic language, which can be contrasted with, and distinguished from, the lucidity, precision and literal, everyday, language."* (Smith & Hoefler 2017: 160). They also should not be seen as mere "beliefs", "products of mind", or "social constructs". Instead, they should be understood as "positional truths", as they are: *"conceptually, ontologically and experientially valid and thus true."* (Poirier 2013: 59–60). From an Mbendjele perspective, they are true in the mind and the body, in the thought and in the lived, too.

In other words, the metaphors here are presented as "windows" to my informants' conceptual and experiential world, similar to previously elaborated work by Nurit Bird-David (1990) about Nayaka, and concerning the Mbendjele and other Yaka, in the work of Lewis (2002) and Köhler and Lewis (2002).

Köhler and Lewis interpreted Yaka "core" or "root" metaphors of animals, plants, and humans as living beings in a shared world (ibid: 299), while remaining interactive – there is no prioritisation of *"human body or human social institutions"* (ibid: 299). *"Yaka animal metaphors for human beings point to qualities they share as a resource and/or in their behavior and attitudes to the forest and to others."*

Accordingly, forest is abounding source of analogies for "ripening" processes in plants, animals, and humans, without prioritization one over another. While Köhler and Lewis (ibid) were specifically addressing the Mbendjele conceptual world in relation with Bilo, the metaphors of ripening are also situated within this framework – these metaphors relate to each other by having common core foundation – Yaka intimate, aesthetic, and emotional relationship with "the forest".

Concerning translation, I agree with Bird-David in that: *"while the translation itself is not problematic, that very fact may obscure divergent cultural perspectives and ontologies. It produces a sense of obviousness which allows the readers to insert their own native intuitions and understandings."* (2008: 525). In an attempt to eliminate

possibilities of this "sense of obviousness", in translating key Mbendjee Yaka terms into English, I added another layer of analysis – I deconstruct literal meanings of key terms, while juxtaposing them with their social uses and meanings and with definitions offered by scholars interested in similar issues. In other words, I will *look into* these Mbendjee Yaka terms to infer their literal meanings; and will *look "out"* at how these terms are utilised, and see how they relate or not with scholarly terms.

To understand Mbendjele concepts of human development, it is necessary to present and examine their child-care practices and beliefs. The following bridges scholarly traditions of child-oriented studies concerning Central African hunter-gatherers and their child-rearing techniques and child-care beliefs, and situates my contribution to this specific field of study.

Child-rearing and Human Development in the Cultural Context of "èkóndʒì" (joint parental responsibility)

Early work of Margaret Mead (1990), and later John and Beatrice Whiting (Whiting 1963; Whiting & Whiting 1975) and their students (Harkness et al. 2010; Harkness & Supereds 1996; LeVine 2007; LeVine et al.eds 1998a, 1998b; LeVine & Neweds 2008) raised questions of cross-cultural variability in childhood, and questioned Western trends of universal human development and then the "universal child" (Montgomery 2009: 3). These universalistic theories were majorly built on Piaget's, Vygotsky's, and Freud's psychological studies (LeVine 2007: 249–250).

The interest in studying hunter-gatherer children and childhoods sprouted in 1960s, after "Man the Hunter" symposium (1968) and after the work of James Woodburn on Hadza, Richard Lee on San and Colin Turnbull on Mbuti, as summarised by Hewlett & Lamb (2005: 5). Bowlby's attachment theory and proposition of evolution of childhood within EEA (Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness), which focuses on mother-infant attachment as a necessary pre-condition for children to grow into emotionally and socially healthy adults, was questioned by Melvin Konner, Patricia Draper and Nick Blurton-Jones and sparked further interest in studying hunter-gatherer childhoods (ibid).

The stress on cross-cultural *variability* of childhood and human development continues to be one of the major issues in socio-cultural anthropological studies of childhood and

human development (Lancy 2015; Montgomery 2009; Tudge 2008). While the studies of Whitings and their students included hunter-gatherers in their analysis, there were tendencies in calling them "pre-industrial", or "traditional" (Hewlett & Lamb 2005: 4), and thus including them into same analytical categories with farming or pastoralist societies. Scholars whose primary interest lies in studying hunter-gatherers, conducted a number of studies to discern hunter-gatherer child care practices with those of the farming or pastoralist populations (Fouts et al. 2005; Hewlett et al. 1998, 2000; Hewlett & Lamb 2002; Hewlett & Roulette 2014).

Contemporary nomadic immediate-return hunter-gatherer childhoods and child-care practices show striking similarities (for reviews see Hewlett & Lambeds 2005; Konner 2010, 2016; Narvaez et al. 2014). While acknowledging some differences, too (see also Hewlett 1996 for Central African hunter-gatherers), these child-care practices are largely highly indulgent, responsive, and child-oriented. Melvin Konner (Konner 2005, 2010, 2016) has analysed and sheltered them under *Hunter-Gatherer Childhood model* (HGC), embracing close physical contact, maternal primacy and dense social context, indulgent and responsive infant care, and variable but higher than cross-cultural average paternal care (ibid 2016: 201).

Central African hunter-gatherer infant and child care practices have been of great scholarly interest in recent decades. The issues of Aka paternal investment, fatherhood, and father-infant bonding was addressed by Barry S. Hewlett (1991a, 1997), scholars were also interested in infant care practices (Hewlett et al. 1998; Meehan et al. 2017), weaning (Fouts et al. 2001, 2005, 2005), as well as alloparenting and multiple caregiving (Hewlett 1991b; Hewlett et al. 1998, 2000; Hewlett & Lambeds 2005; Meehan 2005, 2009; Meehan et al. 2017).

Most of these studies draw on time-allocation data-collection to follow infant and child care *behaviours*, combined with ethnographic interviews about the specific domains of child caretaking to reveal people's *reasoning* or *ideologies* concerning their infant and child care behaviours (Fouts et al. 2005; Hewlett 1991a; Hewlett & Roulette 2014; Hewlett & Winn 2014; Meehan 2005). These scholars have emphasised that "behaviours" and "ideologies" are both important in understanding hunter-gatherer infant-care, and that the "ideologies" in particular are crucial in understanding what drives people for this hunter-gatherer-specific indulgent care giving. For example, in

terms of understanding Aka fatherhood, Hewlett (1991a: 107) remarked that: *"understanding of ideology is essential because it directs human actions."* Similarly, Tronick et al. (1987: 97) emphasized that: *"caretakers draw on knowledge that is culturally based. These strategies are extremely valuable."* Fouts et al. (2012: 124) noted that: *"there is ample evidence that breastfeeding and weaning practices are guided by cultural beliefs about children's development and maternal states."*

I address these issues from a methodologically different approach – by focusing on metaphor-informed ethnography based on participant observation. My contribution to the understanding of *ideologies* and *beliefs* that encompass infant and child care draw from these previous studies concerning "Pygmy" child care – as discussed above – while integrating them with the Mbendjele concept of *ekila,* defined and described by Lewis (2002: 103–120, 2008).

Ekila, herein phonetically *"èkìlá",* is an Mbendjele poly-semic complex system of beliefs, that can refer to: *"menstruation, blood, taboo, a hunter's meat, animals' power to harm humans, and particular dangers to human reproduction, production, health, and sanity."* (2008: 298). Lewis further remarks that *èkìlá*: *"establishes hunting and childbirth as prototypical activities, defining people as men and women, and weaves these roles together in a complex set of interrelationships that serve to counter the strong tendency towards autonomy and fluidity in association."* (ibid: 312).

Specifically, my interest lies in those aspects of *èkìlá* which are associated with pregnancy, birth, child care, child development, and which link child's, mother's, and father's well-being and health, crucial to understanding human development – herein "ripening" processes. In the Yaka literature, these beliefs are majorly linked to *"dangers of reproduction"* or *"childbirth complications"* (Lewis 2008*:* 298) – *"ekondi"* (ibid), *"ekundi"* (Hewlett et al. 1986: 53), herein *"èkóndʒì"*. I argue that *èkóndʒì* beliefs are anecdotally, but fairly richly represented in the ethnographic, anthropological, and ecological record concerning different Yaka groups, even though they often employ different expressions to describe them (e.g. *"ekoni" ,"eke", "kuweri", "ìimbì", "behe"* in Hattori 2006; Ichikawa 1987, 1998; Sato 1998; Soengas López 2010; Tanno 1981; Terashima 2001) or these expressions are absent in the scholarly record, but yet authors provide descriptive examples of similar beliefs (Agland 2012; Aunger 2004; Carpaneto & Germi 1989; Fouts et al. 2012; Gallois 2015: 106; Hattori 2006: 46;

Leonard 1997: 41; Pagezy 1990: 89; Turnbull 1961: 121).

Without attempting to diminish the importance of people's individual life-histories (B. L. Hewlett 2012); biological, environmental, historical, political contexts or the interplay of biology, ecology, and culture (Hewlett 2016) that can inform, mould, and impact infant and child-care practices, too, I argue that *èkóndʒì* beliefs can explain how and what drives Mbendjele for highly responsive and indulgent child care, symptomatic of "pan-hunter-gatherer" (Meehan et al. 2017: 215) child care characteristics (Konner 2005, 2005, 2010, 2016; Narvaez et al. 2014). Previous studies emphasised how core cultural values, "cultural models" or "foundational schemas" of egalitarianism, sharing, and personal autonomy pervade these practices (Hewlett 2014). *Èkóndʒì,* however, naturalises indulgent child-care, and its strength also lies in its explanatory power when these practices are not followed.

Similar to Lewis's approach in describing *"èkìlá"* (2008), I am taking on an ontogenetically-informed course in explaining how *èkóndʒì* is woven into people's everyday realities, since *èkóndʒì* means something different for not-yet-born child, toddler, adolescent, or adult. I will also explain that *èkìlá* and *èkóndʒì* inform the perception of one's reaching adulthood, or using *Bɔ́kɔ́*'s words "ripeness". I draw on ethnographic observations of child-care practices and on how people reasoned about them, as well how they explained people's "failures" and consequences in (non)following prescribed child care practices.

According to my informants, the ripening can be promoted by appropriate "wisdom-sharing", which is bound by specific characteristics and specific contexts, which are seen as vital for these enhancements. The following is an overview of "wisdom-sharing oriented" studies – *studies of social learning.*

Social Learning

Culture is transmitted through various social learning processes[2] – processes that contribute to one's learning through social interactions with others. On the other hand, asocial learning is a type of learning acquired through trial-and-error, individually. Play, participation and observation, teaching, and imitation are major social learning processes (Caro & Hauser, 1992; Crittenden, 2016; Gaskins & Paradise, 2009; Hewlett et al., 2011; Whiten 2017). This thesis focuses on the role of two of these processes Mbendjele social learning – teaching and participation.

While social learning studies in Pygmy groups as well as in other hunter-gatherers increased in popularity among scholars in recent years (Boyette & Hewlett 2017b; Gallois 2015; Gallois et al. 2017; Bonnie Lynn Hewlett 2013; Hewlett, Hillary N. Fouts, et al. 2011; Hewlett et al. 2016; Sonoda 2014, 2016a, 2016b; Terashima & Hewlett eds 2016), as Hewlett & Roulette pointed out: *"little is known about how cultural beliefs and institutions influence the nature, frequency and effectiveness of teaching."* (2016: 12). This thesis aims to address this gap and further our understanding of Congo Basin hunter-gatherer views of social learning. Questions that I address here include: What are Mbendjele views on how culture is reproduced? What are (un)desirable ways of learning? Are there emic categories for teaching and learning? Are there domain-specific ways of learning and teaching?

However, this is not to claim that scholars would not hint on indigenous views of social learning: *"Biyaka parents [say] the primary duty of young children is to play*. *In fact [if] children do not play*, *they will fail to learn anything"* (Neuwelt-Truntzer in David F Lancy 2016: 179). Jarawa hunter-gatherers believe that children should be free to pursue their interest, because adults believe that it is: *"the surest path to learning."* (Pandya 2016: 193).

Studies conducted in hierarchical farming societies have shown that nature and employment of teaching and other social learning processes can depend on people's understanding of growing up and how children are understood as learners (Harkness et al. 2010; Harkness & Supereds 1996; Lancy & Grove 2010a; Rogoff 2003). For

[2] I use "social learning processes" and "cultural learning processes" interchangeably.

instance, Village Learning Model proposed by Lancy and Grove (2010a) presents that in certain societies children are not being taught because they are seen as uneducable, lacking sense, or incapable of learning. These authors, however, discuss mostly hierarchical and sedentary farming societies. In terms of hunter-gatherers, Inuit children are perceived by adults as lacking reason and they are not allowed to employ teasing as adults do (Omura 2016: 272). One of the questions to address here is: How do Mbendjele construct learning capabilities of children? Are children "educable"?

Lancy suggested that some societies proscribe teaching, deeming it harmful as the teaching in a form of instruction can be seen as "infringement" to child's autonomy (2016). Similar views are held by and Inuit: *"direct instruction of children and teenagers is rare because they are assumed to learn what they need to know spontaneously as they mature into reasoning. adults. [It is] absurd to teach, scold, or get angry with children because they have not developed reason."* (Omura 2016: 278–279). Nayaka hunter-gatherers actively refrain from instructing, on an example of hunting traps – but that this does not mean that children would be excluded from knowledge about hunting (Naveh 2016: 128). A similar was made among the Aka hunter-gatherers of Congo Basin: *"*[…] *parents also seemed to restrain themselves to minimize their teaching intervention with infants. For instance, in one episode an infant was cutting food rapidly with a knife as a parent sitting next to her watched, but the parent intervened for only a few seconds to adjust the infant's arm and never said anything during the episode."* (Hewlett and Roulette 2016: 12).

Cautious restrain from instruction was seems to be shared amongst hunter-gatherers cross-culturally (Lew-Levy, Lavi, et al. 2017: 26). However, there are many types of teaching, not instruction only. Instruction that takes on a form of commands (Boyette & Hewlett 2017), instruction in a form of explanation – either verbal or a demonstration. Another type of teaching is evaluative feedback, either positive (e.g. praise, or making simple approving sounds) or different forms of negative feedback, such as teasing, shaming, scolding, criticism, or even a corporal punishment. Another form of teaching is a formal education as is employed in institutions-schools (Barry S. Hewlett 2016b). In this thesis I will address what types of teaching Mbendjele distinguish and if they posses emic terms for these processes of social learning. Also I will look into what forms of teaching Mbendjele employ within the institutions of *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà*.

One of the debates concerning teaching is that it does *not* exist in the small-scale, traditional, or pre-industrial societies (Csibra & Gergely 2011; Garfield et al. 2016; Hewlett & Roulette 2016). Fiske's (1997) unpublished monograph about "lack of teaching" was particularly impactful (Csibra & Gergely 2011: 1152). Cultural anthropologists continue to emphasise that teaching in small-scale societies is rare (Lancy & Grove 2010b; Lave & Wenger 1991; Paradise & Rogoff 2009; Rogoff 2014; Rogoff et al. 2003) or even non-existent (Lancy 2010). The debate of its existence and non-existence in small-scale societies continues (David F. Lancy 2016a, 2016b), even thought recent studies show strong evidence that varieties of teaching types are employed in small-scale hunter-gatherer studies (Boyette 2013; Boyette & Hewlett 2017b, 2017a; Garfield et al. 2016; Hewlett et al. 2011b; Hewlett & Roulette 2016; Lew-Levy, Lavi, et al. 2017; Lew-Levy, Reckin, et al. 2017).

This polarity of views stems from diverse definitions of "teaching" as such – as the claims of 'lack of teaching' were based on the stereotyped understanding of teaching as explicit, Euroamerican-like and direct, or instructive teaching (Csibra & Gergely 2011: 1152; Hewlett & Roulette 2016: 2). For instance, Lancy defines teaching as *"active and systematic intervention of a teacher whose goal is to change the behaviour of a learner."* (Lancy 2010: 98). Resembling formalised teaching in Western schools, it is unsurprising that such form of teaching does not exist in small-scale societies (Lew-Levy, Reckin, et al. 2017).

By defining teaching to instances when *"an individual modifies her/his behaviour to enhance learning in another,"* Hewlett and Roulette (2016: 4) found regular instances of several types of teaching in Aka Pygmies: natural pedagogy, demonstration, task assignment, positive and negative feedback and opportunity scaffolding. The authors coded teaching behaviours that were videotaped in a naturalistic setting. While one of the questions they were addressing was the existence of teaching, they made a major contribution to our understanding of teaching in Congo Basin hunter gatherer society. The results show, that for example teaching is often very brief and thus, easy to be missed while recording these behaviours simply by an observation in the field. Hewlett & Roulette have also shown that different types of teaching occurred in different domains of knowledge or a skill. For example, demonstration was the most common teaching style of social norms and values, negative feedback was used to address social norms and values and positive feedback was employed in teaching how to dance and

sing. This study however, accounts for infants and does involve teaching of older children or adults.Employing the same working definition of teaching to cross-cultural analysis of social learning processes employed in hunter-gatherer societies, Garfield et al (2016: 30) found that teaching was the most common process of social learning in across various cultural domains. Within this thesis I will employ this definition of teaching.

While I agree with Hewlett & Roulette (2016) in that socio-anthropologists downplayed the role of teaching in small-scale societies by over-emphasising informal social learning – and this thesis does not attempt to do so either – the expressions that these authors employ provoke for nuanced definitions of teaching-like and learning-like processes. For example, "learning guided by others", "facilitating learning", "encouragements" (Lancy 2010; Lancy & Grove 2011). Nuanced, culturally-sensitive definitions of teaching are necessary – I will summarise Mbendjele types of teaching in the final discussion of this thesis.

Observation and participation were emphasized as one of the key social learning processes in small-scale societies (Lancy & Grove 2010a, 2010b; Paradise & Rogoff 2009; Rogoff 2003). Rogoff (2003: 135) coined the term "pitching in" which means children's participation in adult work. Another type of participatory social learning is learning "by osmosis": *"picking up values, skills, and mannerisms in an incidental fashion through close involvement with a socializing agent."* (2003: 324) typical for learning apprenticeship. Intent participation: *"learners attend to in- formative ongoing events that are not necessarily designed for their instruction."* (2003: 324). Intent participation involves keen observation of highly motivated individual.

These participatory approaches to social learning emphasise the role of group or community in facilitating learning/teaching (Gaskins & Paradise 2010; Lave & Wenger 1991; Paradise & Rogoff 2009; Rogoff 2003, 2014). Participation in adult activities gives opportunities for children to refine and develop their skills further. This thesis will also address the question of what role participation plays in the Mbendjele institutions. I agree with Rogoff who argued that: *"We need to move beyond studying only individual or dyadic aspects of teaching to a broader, cultural view of interpersonal and community ways of fostering learning, at least for humans."* (Rogoff 2015).

Another issue of great interest in studies of social learning and cultural reproduction concerned the question of from whom people learn. By using means of population genetics, Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman (1981) have demonstrated that transmission of cultural traits is not only "vertical" as in the genetics – from parent to offspring (vertical social learning), but also from and among peers – "horizontal social learning" and from non-biological adults, too – "oblique social learning". The first study that examined modes of cultural transmission in Central African hunter-gatherers was performed by one of its authors in cooperation with Hewlett (1986). This was motivated by the ambiguous claims of social anthropologists in terms of who is plays more important role in the transmission of cultural traits – parents or that everyone in the camp (Hewlett 2014: 265)?

The researchers (1986) analysed reported Aka transmission pathways in learning specific cultural knowledge and skills (e.g. infant care, hunting, dancing). The study has shown the importance and prevalence of vertical cultural transmission in early childhood, identifying that by the age of 10, children acquire 70% of most skills – both social and survival-related (ibid: 933). This study had a major impact on the studies of cultural reproduction in Congo Basin hunter-gatherers and number of studies since then focused on the *modes of* transmission of specific cultural traits.

However, authors relied on *reported* transmission pathways, which can be biased towards vertical transmission, influenced by understanding parents as the first teachers (for discussion, see Boyette 2013). This was shown in the study by Boyette (2013) who found discrepancy between reported and observed cases of transmission of specific cultural traits. While reported accounts emphasised the role of the parents, observational part of the study has shown that it was the oblique transmission that was important during middle childhood and adolescence. In a cross-cultural study of acquisition of hunting skills, Macdonald concluded that both parents and other adults are important in learning hunting (MacDonald 2007). Other scholars pointed to the importance of horizontal transmission in children's learning ethnoecological knowledge a (Boyette 2013; Gallois 2015) and primacy of children's peer groups (horizontal transmission) in learning about gender norms and values and subsistent skills (Lew-Levy, Lavi, et al. 2017; Lew-Levy, Reckin, et al. 2017). Recent findings, mainly the cross-cultural study of cultural transmission in hunter-gatherer societies has shown, that while vertical transmission remains crucial in early childhood, it is the oblique transmission that

predominates over the life-span (2016: 31), a "two-staged model" (Hewlett et al. 2011a). This thesis contributes also to the discussion on modes of cultural transmission. While I am examining social learning by looking at the the institutions that are based on communal activities and interactions of the group, I will look at the role of a group in the modes of cultural transmission (see Table 3) – does *mòsámbò* represent a case of one-to-many cultural transmission given the fact that in *mòsámbò* one speaks to many? I will attempt to answer this question as well as explore the role of group in modes of the cultural transmission in *mòádʒò* and *màssánà*, too.

Table 3 Modes of cultural transmission by Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman (1981)

	Modes of cultural transmission			
	Vertical parent-to-child	Horizontal contagious	one-to-many	many-to-one
Transmitter	Parent(s)	Unrelated	Teacher / leader/ media	Older members of social group
Transmittee	Child	Unrelated	Pupils /citizens / audience	Younger members of social group
Acceptance of Innovation	Intermediate Difficulty	Easy	Easy	Very difficult
Variation between individuals within population	High	Can be high	Low	Lowest
Variation between groups	High	Can be high	Can be high	Smallest
Cultural evolution	Slow	Can be rapid	Most rapid	Most conservative

In summary, this thesis' scope in terms of social learning can be summarised in the following questions: What are the Mbendjele views on social learning processes? What is the role of teaching in Mbendjele social learning? What is the nature of social learning processes employed in *mòsámbò, mòádʒò,* and *màssánà*?

Mòsámbò, mòádʒò, màssánà

Mòsámbò, mòádʒò, and *màssánà* were acknowledged as important in promoting reproduction of Mbendjele egalitarianism (Lewis 2002, 2014a) and my informants highlighted their importance in promoting people's "ripeness". This thesis contributes specifically to understanding *how* these institutions are employed for teaching and learning, as well as *what* is being transmitted. I do this with analysis of "real-life" ethnographic instances.

Each of these institutions are defined by their formal and aesthetic characteristics and qualities. Consequently, cultural transmission processes that occur *within* the contexts of these institutions, can be constrained by the nature of their prescribed form: *mòsámbò* is a form of public speech, *mòádʒò* are also public events, based on merciless ridicule of other's silly actions, and *màssánà* are communal joyful actions of play and ritual (Lewis 2002, 2009, 2014b, 2014a, 2016). This thesis provides a detailed analysis of cultural transmission processes that occur within these institutions.

Contemporary Bantu languages – such as Mbendjee Yaka – continue to carry with some semantic productivity (Demuth 2000: 287; Denny & Creider 2010; Katamba 2006). Thus, the prefixes and suffixes of nouns grasp specific meanings. In this section I will look *into* the expressions of *"mòsámbò"*, *"mòádʒò"*, and *"màssánà"* in an attempt to explain in what ways these words' literal meanings could be interpreted, and present some examples of how my informants highlighted importance of these institutions in teaching and learning processes. Before doing so, I will introduce each concept in terms of how they were described and analysed within Central African hunter-gatherer publications.

Mòsámbò

Mosambo, herein *"mòsámbò"*, is an Mbendjele public speaking protocol, a problem-solving, organisational, and pro-egalitarian institution (Lewis 2002, 2009, 2014a). *"Through mosambo camp members inform the camp of what they have done, express their opinions, advise camp members, share news of general interest, and seek a consensus, or not, about what the camp will do and who should do what."* (ibid 2014: 231).

While Lewis provided coherent view of the Mbendjele *mòsámbò,* it seems that other Yaka groups have a similar institution. Though mostly briefly, speaking similar to *mòsámbò* was mentioned in Central African Pygmy literature (Combettes & Tomassone 1978: 108–114; Fitzgerald 2011: 49; Guillaume 1991; Gusinde 1955: 24; Heymer 1980: 190–191; Kimura 1990; Leonard 1997: 70; Leonhardt 1999: 261–262; Museur 1969: 153; Soengas López 2009: 195; Thomas & Arom eds 1991: 166; Turnbull 1961; C. M. Turnbull 1965). To *mòsámbò* -like speaking, scholars also have mistakenly referred to it as *"council of elders"* (Gusinde 1955: 24), or *"assembly of elders"* (Soengas López 2009: 195).

Thomas et al. (1991: 166) observed that Aka have the same institution with identical name *".sámbò"*. The authors remarked that it is often spoken by elders, but that the opinions shared through the speech must represent what most people think, which accords with the observation of Lewis (2002: 79; 2014a: 232) about Mbendjele's *mòsámbò.*

Often, the discussion or mentioning of the speech emerged when scholars puzzled about the issues of "leadership" and "authority" in Pygmy groups, and seeming counter-intuitiveness of an individual ("elder") who gives advice, and yet he is not necessary listened to. These scholars emphasised the role of the speech in problem-solving and work organisation, while remarking its non-authoritarian nature. For example, Heymer observed about Aka (1980: 190–191; my emphasis): *"one of the elders from the various camps functions in some ways as leader, giving advice and suggesting possible courses of action, although decisions are made by common consent, not authoritatively."* (for similar descriptions, see Gusinde 1955: 24; Leonhardt 1999: 261–262).

In a footnote of his paper *"Everyday conversations of the Baka Pygmies",* Kimura (2014: 94) stated that Baka have a speech protocol, which is similar to Bongando's *bonango* – and *bonango* shows similarities with *mòsámbò* (ibid 1990) – but he did not provide further information about how Baka refer to this sort of speech. Fitzgerald (2011: 49) mentioned Baka's *"speech act of formal counsel" "kàlò",* but did not describe its form, content, nor its functions. Combettes and Tomassone (1978: 108-114) translate and transliterate one example of *mòsámbò*-like speech, but being concerned with the linguistic characteristics of Aka language, authors do not discuss its ethnographic features and meanings. Lastly, Turnbull (1961) seems to hint on these speeches descriptively: *"sound trashing"* (ibid: 110); *"making loud remarks across the*

camp" (ibid: 121); *"loud tirades"* (ibid: 41) or *"striding up and down across the camp"* (ibid: 148).

The importance of public *group* opinions, discussions, and negotiations in hunter-gatherer societies was emphasised in terms of social control, problem-disentangling, and maintenance of egalitarian politics (Boehm et al. 1993a: 230; Boehm 2000: 92, 2008, 2012: 856; Boehm & Boehm 2009: 335). For example, Konner (2015, e-book, n.p.) observed amongst !Kung: *"There might be three or five or eight adults speaking; participation was optional. Voices were active, sometimes argumentative, sometimes lyrical, and they were usually in both male and female registers. It was open airing of difficulties that, if not solved, could affect everyone."*

However, such events did not receive attention in terms of their "teaching and learning" potential. And yet, in societies without hierarchies, freedom in mobility, and respect for personal autonomy, these public group events create specific opportunities for teaching and learning about the economic production, problem-solving, group organisation, or about "goodness" and "badness" of people's actions. As remarked by Lewis (2014: 231), *mòsámbò*: *"also provides a forum for children to learn about social and moral values and about the etiquette of public discussion."* Here I present detailed analysis of *how* and *what* is being taught and learned *through* and *within* the context of *mòsámbò.*

"Mòsámbò" Pleads and Gives Advice

Mòsámbò, in plural *mèsámbò*, shares common verb root *"-sámb-"* with Lingala *"ko-sámbela"*. *Ko-sámbela* in Lingala is used in meanings of "to pray", "to conduct religious activity", "to plead" (Redden & Bongo 1963: 233), or "to advise" (in religious or patron-client context; Lewis 2016: 149). The meaning of *mòsámbò* is closest to "to advise" and to "to plead". However, it cannot be simply translated as "an advice" or "a plea". In casual, everyday settings, if someone needs help or advice, they like to ask for help directly:

Sùŋgá	***(à)mɛ́!***
help.PRS	1SG
'Help me!'	

Or ask others to "share their hands":

Kàbá	***búsɛ́***	***mà-bɔ́!***
share.PRS	1PL	6-hand

'Share hands with us!'

Even though what speakers do through *mòsámbò* is giving advice and pleading, the expression of *"mòsámbò"* is used *exclusively* for an Mbendjele-specific <u>*institution of advice*</u>, that must fulfil certain aesthetic qualities and style that define them as *mòsámbò*, herein a form of public speaking (details will be discussed in the chapter of *Mòsámbò*). Thus, if pleading or advice that does not take a form of public speaking, it is *not mòsámbò.*

Complementary to the *Bɔ́kɔ́'s* speech at the opening of this thesis, the following expressions are to illustrate how my informants reasoned about *mòsámbò:*

Mò-sámbò	***à-kàbà-<u>ɲìɛ́</u>***	***mà-yɛ́lɛ́.***
3-public.speaking	3SG-share-DISTR	6-wisdom

'Mòsámbò distributes wisdom.'

That led me to a conclusion that *mòsámbò* is indeed perceived as a specific venue for wisdom sharing and promoting people's maturation. The distributive morpheme *"ɲìɛ́"* is speculated to be a remnant of an ancient "Pygmy" language, since it is not shared with other Bantu languages (Duke 2001: 57). It is used to increase valency of the verb: *"by an indefinite number of object beneficiaries"* (ibid: 56). While the verb stem *"-kàb-"* means "to share", if "*ɲìɛ́"* is attached, it means that sharing goes from "one-to-each". It means that through *"mòsámbò"* one (the speaker) shares wisdom with each and every one – *mòsámbò* distributes wisdom.

Mò-sámbò	***à-kànì-<u>dʒɛ́</u>***	***mè-ndɔ́***	***mò***	***mò-ná***	***mò-súkú.***
3-public.speaking	3SG-put-CAUS	4-issue	in	1-child	3-head

'Mòsámbò causes issues to get in the child's head.'

"-dʒɛ́" is a causative valency-increasing morpheme (Duke 2001: 56). While *"kàn"* means "to put", "*kànì-dʒɛ́"* is to *cause* that something is being put. Thus, through means of *mòsámbò,* speaker causes issues to get into people's heads.

Mòádʒò

Mòádʒò are female public mocking events, re-enactments of people's silly, "stupid", or inappropriate actions (Lewis 2002, 2009, 2014b). Similar to *mòsámbò,* ridicule and teasing were observed and described in Yaka groups, while joking was identified as one of the basic features of Yaka sense of humour. *Mòádʒò* can incorporate various forms of humour, such as mockery, ridicule, or teasing. Lewis mostly refers to *mòádʒò* as a event of mocking or ridicule (2009; 2014a). While mockery involves *mimicking* someone's behaviour, ridicule is used here in more general terms as to subject to dismissive behaviour . This thesis will illustrate that literal re-enactments involving mimicry is not always the case in *mòádʒò*. My research also shows that *mòádʒò* can take a form of teasing, basic feature of which is *"provoking in a playful way"* or *"tempting someone sexually with no intention of satisfying the desire aroused"* (Oxford Dictionary of English 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

Turnbull emphasises the importance of ridicule in Mbuti society. He refers to the employment of ridicule (1961: 34, 114); to the ridicule based on re-enacting someone's behaviour and to the repetitions of re-enacted events (ibid: 137); to exaggeration of ridiculing actions (ibid: 134); and to the people's sensitivity if being ridiculed (1961: 114). Similarly, Leonard mentions that ridicule and joking is employed by the Baka Pygmies to settle disputes and disagreements (Leonard 1997: 12). Michelle Kisliuk offered also several examples of performances similar to *mòádʒò*, which occurred during female *eboka* performances (Kisliuk 2000). Koulaninga (2009: 80–81) discusses the nature of mockeries of Mbendjele and Aka from Central African Republic, but the author does not specify the gender of performers, nor provides examples of how these mockery events unfold.

Ridicule is one of the major hunter-gatherer social control tools and modes of egalitarian sanctioning (Boehm 2012; Boehm et al. 1993b; Boehm & Boehm 2009; Woodburn 1982). It is known to be employed by various hunter-gatherer groups: Hadza, Mbuti (Turnbull, 1961), and San in Africa, Ngukurr in Australia, and Enga in New Guinea, and Paliyans in India (Boehm et al. 1993b: 230). Teasing, together with beating, shaming, intensive staring, gaze avoidance, leaving the child alone, threats of danger, and isolation of the child from others are common forms of sanctioning unwanted behaviours of children in small-scale societies (Lancy 2015). adults and peers

across cultures use diverse forms of ridicule to educate children about the appropriate ways to act, as summarised by Rogoff (2003: 217–221),

In hunter-gatherer societies, Crittenden observed that public mocking and humiliation was used to sanction non-sharing in Hadza children (Crittenden 2016: 66), teasing was employed by Chabu forager-farmers in teaching spear-hunting (Dira and Hewlett, 2016), and Canadian Inuits In this thesis, I will explore the role of *mòádʒò* as a specific context *wherein* teaching and learning occurs, while discussing its similarities and differences of teaching by teasing, mocking, and ridicule employed by other hunter-gatherers.

"Mòádʒò" Does and Re-does

Mbendjee Yaka have two prefixes that sound the same, but have different meanings and create different gender pairings: the prefix *"mò-",* which can be either referring to people and other animates if in class one, or can refer to inanimates if in class three (see the table "Bantu nominal class prefixes" at the beginning of this thesis). For example, *"mò-nà"* can be interpreted as "a child" in class one, or "state of being a child" in class three. Accordingly, *mòsámbò*'s definition above could be more nuanced and interpreted as a specific "state of advice-giving".

The inanimate word *"mòádʒò"*, thus, refers to the "state of being". However, the interpretation of the word stem *"ádʒ-ò"* is not that straightforward and clear. There are two possible interpretations that come to my mind. My Mbendjele informants utilised two verbs that refer to "to do" and/or "to make": *"kìá"/ "gìá"* or *"dʒìé".* If *"ádʒò"* relates to "doing"/ "making", then it accords with "re-enactments" (Lewis 2009) where performers are in the state of re-doing and re-making others' actions. The second possible interpretation of *"ádʒò"* could be related with the word of "the body" – *"ndʒò"* (or "njo" in Lewis 2016: 151). If this is truth, then "*mòádʒò"* could be defined as "a specific state of a body". Whether it is translated as a specific "state of (re)doing" or a specific "state of doing something with the bodies", it reflects on the interpretation by Lewis, where *"mòádʒò"* refers to specific actions of women who use their *bodies* to *re-enact/ re-do* someone else's inappropriate or stupid behaviour (Lewis 2009, 2014a, 2014b).

Mòádʒò was seen as potent in promoting people's maturation. What follows is a view on *mòádʒò* by elder *Bɔ̀bílà.* On one occasion – after his son's showing-off actions were re-enacted and mocked – he shared with me what are the impacts of *mòádʒò* on child's learning:

Mò-ádʒò	***à-dìé***	***nà***	***ndùngá.***
3-public.mocking	3SG-be.PRS	with	5.sharpness

'Mòádʒò is sharp.'

Bà-ítò	***bà-mpìá***	***mò-ádʒò***	***nà***	***mò-nà***	***bándí —***
3PL-woman	3PL-touch.PRS	3-public.mocking	with	1-child	showing.off

'Women perform mòádʒò about a child who shows off.'

Mò-nà	***à***	***dìé***	***nà***	***m-ínò,***	***à***	***dìé***	***nà***	***kúmbá,***
1-child	3SG	be.PRS	with	6-tooth	3SG	be.PRS	with	running

à	***bómbà***	***ndʒò.***
3SG	hide.PRS	5.body

'The child is upset, runs, hides.'

Bá-nà,	***nà***	***bà-ítò,***	***nà***	***bà-tò***	***b-ésé***	***tú —***
2-child	with	2-woman	with	2-person	2-all	all[FR:tout]

bénέ	***mɔ̀t-á***	***yέ***	***nà***	***búdì.***
3PL	laugh.at-PRS	3SG	with	9.hardness

'Children, women, and all the people laugh at her/him harshly.'

Kèndé	***bó,***	***kénèkénè***	***mò-nà***	***ú***	***à-mpìá***	***mò-súkú.***
<	however	now	1-child	DEM	3SG-touch	3-head

'However, now this child touches her/his head.'

À-фóфá	***bóná:***	***"À —***	***àmé***	***ébá***	***dèʒà."***
3SG-talk.PRS	like.this	sensation.of.realisation	1SG	know.PRS	already[FR:déjà]

'S/he talks like this: "Oh – now I understand!"'

Mò-nà	***à-mpìá***	***mò-súkú:***	***"Bándí***	***à-dìé***	***bìén***	***támbí!"***
1-child	3SG-touch.PRS	3-head	showing.off	3SG-be.PRS	good[FR:bien]	NEG

'The child touches her/his head with realisation: "Showing off is not good!"'

Bó,	***mò-ádʒò***	***à-kàná-ká***	***mà-yɛ́lɛ́***	***mò-nà***	***ò***	***mò-súkú.***
so	3-public.mocking	3SG-put-PRF	6-wisdom	1-child	in	3-head

'So mòádʒò has inserted wisdom into the child's head.'

Màssánà

In contrast with *mòsámbò* and *mòádʒò*, *màssánà* and "play" has received wide scholarly attention, also in terms of cultural transmission and its "pedagogic" potency (Boyette 2016; Boyette & Hewlett 2017a; Gray 2015; Hewlett & Boyette 2012; Lewis 2002: 124–198, 2016). While heavily building on the work of Lewis and Oloa Biloa, I narrow my focus to adult-children interactions within *màssánà* here.

"Màssánà" — Multiplicity of Play/Ritual

Màssánà's verb root *"-sán-"*, shared with with Lingala's *"ko-sana"*, and *"ko-sakana"* refers to "to play", "to amuse oneself", or "to have a good time" (Boeck 1904: 108; Divuilued 2005: 83; Redden & Bongo 1963: 146). In contrast with *mòsámbò* and *mòádʒò*, *màssánà*'s prefix *"mà-"* indicates that it is uncountable mass noun (Combettes & Tomassone 1978: 29). Within Proto-Bantu noun class system, *"mà-"* has a semantic productivity of "liquid masses" (Demuth 2000: 275; Denny & Creider 2010: 4), "multiplicity" (Demuth 2000: 283), and "modes of action" (Hendrikse & Poulos 1992 :199-201 in Katamba 2006: 115).

If *màssánà* literally means "multiplicity of play/ritual, and amusement/joy", then, it projects on ethnographic reality – *màssánà* takes on *multiple* forms and styles with primary goal of bringing *joy together,* as a community (Lewis 2002: 124). *Màssánà* is placed in the same semantic group as for example water *"màí"* – it is uncountable, mass, liquidly. Metaphorically – if taken a bit further – this uncountability, multiplicity, action-based and "mass-like" features of *màssánà* resonate in ethnographic analysis by Lewis (2016: 151) – during the *màssánà* ritual events, people are *"mixing up their bodies"* by sitting closely together. This encourages the group to feel as *one*, uncountable, inseparable unity that reaches "sacred zone" of communitas.

Màbɔ́tà, a father of six children, appeared to me as very keen in encouraging children in participating in *màssánà.* Once, he explained to me why it is so important:

Mò-nà àŋgámù à tí mpìá mà-ssánà.
1-child 1SG.POSS 3SG NEG touch.PRS 6-play
'My child doesn't participate in màssánà.'

Àmɛ́ ɸóɸá nà ní bó:
1SG talk.PRS to 3SG that
'I talk to her/him like this:'

"Mpìá mà-ssánà! Mpìá mà-bɔ́! Mpìá búnú bú!"
take.PRS 6-play take.PRS 6-hand take.PRS drum DEM
'"Participate in màssána! Clasp your hands! Beat that drum!"'

Àmɛ́ ɸóɸá nà ní bóná téé͡é́.
1SG talk.PRS to 3SG like.that sensation.of.duration
'I talk to her/him like that for a long time.'

Àmɛ́ ɸóɸá nà ní bóná bà-mbálá b-íké!
1SG talk.PRS to 3SG like.that 2-time 2-a.lot
'I talk to her/him like that many times!'

Sìsòkò b-éndà bá — àmɛ́ ɸóɸá nà ní nà búdì!
on.top.of 8-thing 8.DEM 1SG talk.PRS to 3SG with 9.hardness
'On top of it, I talk to her/him these things loudly!'

Mò-nà à-tádè, à tí ébá bó mà-ssánà
1-child 3SG-ripen.PRS 3SG NEG know.PRS that 6-play

à-kàbá è-ssɛ́ŋgò nà bà-tò b-ésɛ́ tú.
3SG-share 7-joy to 2-person 2-all all[FR:tout]
'The child ripens yet, s/he doesn't know that màssánà brings joy to all the people!'

Mò-nà ú à tí ébá bó mà-ssánà à-kàtá bà-tò
1-child DEM 3SG NEG know.PRS that 6-play 3SG-share 2-person

mò è-bɛ́ndɛ́ yí-mɔ̀tí.
into 7-place 7-one
'The child doesn't know that màssánà ties people together into a single place.'

Yà ŋgá mà-ssánà bá-nà bà-ɸóŋgà nà mà-yɛ́lɛ́!
POSS DEM 6-play 2-child 3PL-grow.PRS into 6-wisdom
'It is because of the màssánà that children grow into wisdom!'

Thesis Outline

This thesis delves into various dimensions of what Mbendjele mean when they talk about *ripening* beliefs and practices concerning human development, child-rearing, and teaching and learning – to examine the nature of cultural transmission of an Mbendjele Yaka culture. Throughout this thesis I demonstrate that *ripening* is (pro)egalitarian both in the mind and the body – egalitarian nature of ripening emerges in everyday discourse as well as in people's child-rearing, and teaching and learning practices. While metaphor and discourse-informed ethnographic analysis is to illustrate how these concepts are spoken about; by the analysis of "real-life" teaching and learning examples within the context of Mbendjele institutions of public speaking, public ridicule, and communal actions of play I illustrate how ripening is put into practice.

This thesis is composed of ten chapters that explore these areas of ripening, based on the fieldwork conducted with the Mbendjele Yaka from the villages of Bangui-Motaba and Djoubé, situated in the Likouala Department, Republic of Congo (2013-2015).

Chapter two explores environmental and social setting of Mbendjele life in studied locality and community. The following presents "ethnographic setting" by exploring socio-political, historic and economic background to illuminate the context in which the practices of ripening that I describe are used, including introducing my key informants, and remarking on some aspects of my personal fieldwork journey.

Chapter three discusses fieldwork methods and techniques as well as addresses the major challenges and issues that I encountered with. Description of the informants is included here as well.

Chapter four unwraps Mbendjele metaphors concerning people's development, teaching and learning. By the analysis of social meanings of these metaphors and the underlying principles that emerge through these metaphors, I present desirable ways of one's maturation as well as the desirable nature of learning/teaching from an Mbendjele standpoint. The questions to address in this chapter are how are the concept of child, adult, and growing up constructed? What are the social meanings of these metaphors? How Mbendjele refer to teaching and learning-like processes? How do they refer to people's specialisations and expertise?

Chapter five composes ethnographic reality of children's development through the ideological prism of *èkìlá* taboo complex. I argue that understanding how *èkìlá* permeates people's lives is essential to understanding child-rearing practices and human development. I will focus particularly in what ways people experience *èkóndʒì* as they mature by analysis of human "life-stages", as observed in the field. The analysis moves on to show what role *èkìlá* and *èkóndʒì* play in determining people's maturity.

Based on my informants' emphasis on *mòsámbò, mòádʒò, màssánà*, chapters six, seven, and eight focus on presenting detailed ethnographic accounts of these institutions and analyse observations of teaching and learning practices within the contexts of these Mbendjele institutions. These chapters are structured in a similar fashion – firstly I exploit the contexts and functions, and purposes of their uses. Then, the analyses move on an examination of what and how is being taught.

Chapter nine contrasts these institutions with outsider-imposed institutions, as observed within the state school specifically designed for Mbendjele. I will juxtapose Mbendjele worldview of ripening with that of school teachers.

2 ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

My research with Mbendjele took place in the Likouala Department in Republic of the Congo-Brazzaville for a period of eighteen months (August 2013 – March 2015). I stayed in several localities and surrounding forest camps: Bonguinda, Bangui-Motaba, Sombo (Thanry) and mainly the village Djoubé (Bobanda) (see Figure 2).

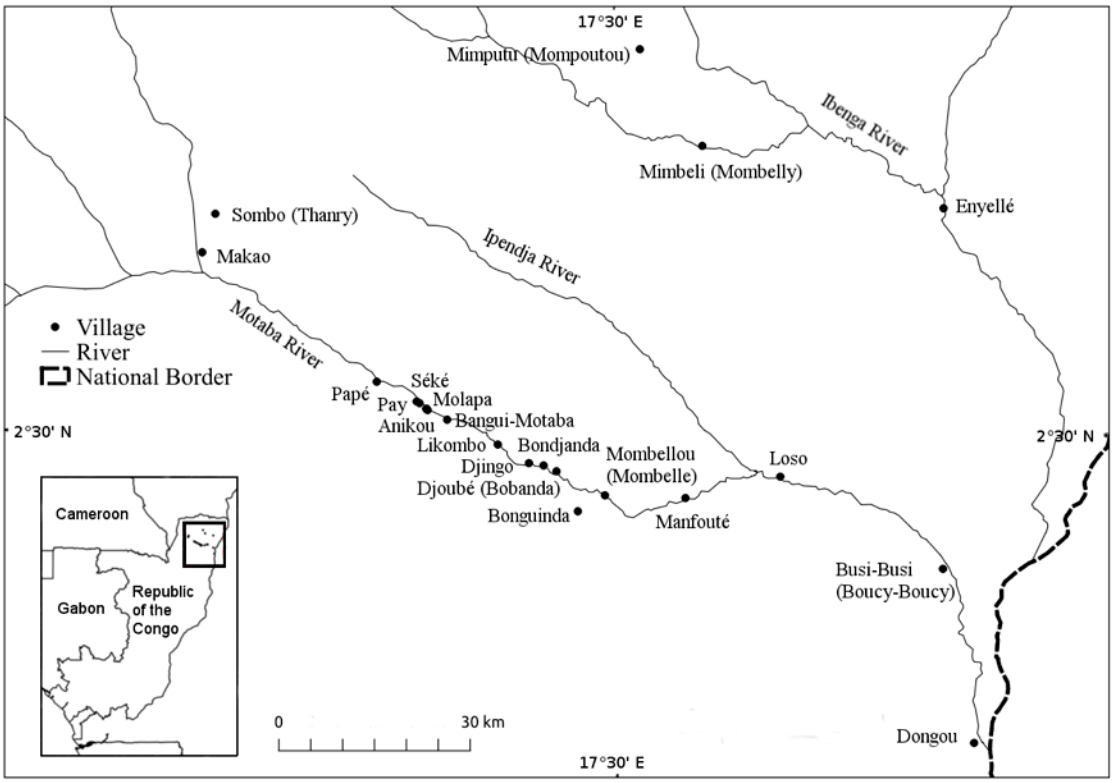

Figure 2 Map of the research area, Likouala, Republic of Congo

This map is selective as it does not contain all the villages on the Motaba and Ibenga Rivers. It lists only those localities which I mention in the text. I made this map based on templates provided at the website: "Interactive Forest Atlas of the Republic of the Congo", available at: http://cog.forest-atlas.org/map/ (Global Forest Watch 2016). Atlas data are licenced under a *Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence*, which allows free redistribution and transformation of the material. Changes were made to the original data.

My first contact with Mbendjele was in the village of Bonguinda. My research project colleague Camille Oloa Biloa (2016) was conducting her fieldwork in this locality and helped me with starting up. I needed, however, to find my own research site and key informants to work with. My first stop was in the village Bangui-Motaba, situated within the concessions of logging company *Congolaise Industrielle de Bois* (CIB).

After spending three weeks in Bangui-Motaba, I continued on my journey to search for a research locality. A few families from Bangui-Motaba that I had befriended by that time accompanied me. We walked southward along the Motaba River and visited several villages: Djingo, the abandoned village of Mokili-Ngongo, Bondjanda, and finally made the decision to stay in Djoubé, also known as Bobanda. This chapter will discuss some general historical, economic, ethnic, and cultural characteristics of the study area.

About Djoubé (Bobanda)

Djoubé, situated at 2° 25' N latitude and 17° 28' E longitude, lies within the Department of Likouala, and on the bank of Motaba River, a tributary of the Ubangi-Congo River. The terrain of the village elevates moderately from the river bank towards the cacao plantations and bordering with the riverine forest (raffia palm, swamp forests, dry and semi-deciduous forests). The village area is divided into two main neighbourhoods (*Ɔŋgɛ́lɛ́* and *Pɛ́tɛ́*), which is typical of the region. Each of these neighbourhoods consists of the farmers' area alongside the river, and the Mbendjele area closest to the forest. Thus, the village has four neighbourhoods – two inhabited by Mbendjele and two by Bilo. I stayed and worked with the Mbendjele from the neighbourhood of *Pɛ́tɛ́*. There are also two schools in the village: a public school where Bilo children attend and a school for Mbendjele children that is to prepare Yaka children for public schools (called ORA). Both schools are situated in the *Ɔŋgɛ́lɛ́* neighbourhood.

Some Remarks on History and Economics

At the end of the 19th century, French colonialists and geographers were aware of the existence of the Motaba River, but it remained unexplored by Westerners until the expedition of Paul de Villelongue in 1901 (Villelongue 1904). Soon after the expedition, René Dessirier de Pauwel, who was French colonial administrator, began

commercial negotiations with the population inhabiting the areas of the river (Jourdan 1902: 58). This meant that French business and trade with the local population commenced before actual colonisation.

On a second attempt, after successful resistance by the local population in 1907, French militia approached the area from the North. Eighty-five sharpshooters and twenty-five auxiliaries under the supervision of captain Prokos and lieutenant Mourin 'pacified' the villages along the Ibenga River – first Mombelly and then Mompoutou (Denis & Viraud 1931: 139; today known as Mimbeli and Mimputu). From there, the troops moved southwards and colonised the area of the Motaba River. The region of Motaba-Ibenga was officially annexed to the Middle Congo by 1909. "Middle Congo" (Congo-Brazzaville), Gabon, Oubangui Chari (Central African Republic) and Chad were then parts of the Central African area colonised by France – *French Equatorial Africa* (Pakenham 1992).

To my knowledge, Djoubé was omitted from colonial and military publications from the beginning of the 20th century, however, the villages of Bangui-Motaba, Mombellou, Manfoute and Busi-Busi existed at that time. In fact, the village of Mombellou, situated eight kilometres down the river from Djoubé, served as one of the French military stations (Denis & Viraud 1931).

Colonial taxation policy dictated resettlements of the local population. People left the forest and settled by the river. This was also the case for Djoubé. Proximity to the river facilitated French colonial monitoring and repressions as well as business and trade. As indicated in Djoubé's creation legend, the local population reflected on their colonial history:

> At first, there was only forest, the water and not many people in this area. If there were any people, they were only small groups of fisherman or hunters here or there, or small families with their children passing by searching for food. Small camps were created downstream of the river, small camps that later became big villages of Loso, Manfute, and Busi-Busi.
>
> As time passed, these small camps filled up with people, so the waters of the Motaba River became too poor in fish. Some men decided to go upstream and settle somewhere where not many people lived and where there was

plenty of fish. Amongst them was a man called *Bòbándá*. He was said to be a true and good man – a fisherman and farmer from Busi-Busi. He built his house on the very same ground of the village as he had seen how fertile the earth was and how rich the waters were with fish. He and his people lived here peacefully.

One day, a fierce warrior called *Mássá* left his homeland of today's Central African Republic, and conquered village after village. He, his people, and his slaves over-ruled Makao, Bangui-Motaba, Likombo, Mokili-Ngongo, Bondjanda – all of the villages until he came to this place, where *Bòbándá* lived. *Mássá* killed *Bòbándá* easily, as he was skilled in secret black magic knowledge (*póké*). He was a very special man indeed! If he wanted to do so – he could transform animals into humans and humans into animals or even trees! He could kill a person mystically and in such a way that you would not even know that you were already dead!

Because it was the time of colonialism, white men came to the area of Dongou and took a boat upstream the rivers, as to see what was deeper in these lands. Their white chief had a name everybody used to know, but people had forgotten his name already. As these men were passing by the village territory, they saw a narrow path going up onto the riverbank. The chief thought to himself: *"There must be people living here!"*

The white people were very strategic; they left different things such as soap, salt, and clothes on the path. Their chief said: *"I am going to see whether these things will disappear!"* So the group of men left and came back after a week. When they returned, there was no salt, no soap, nor any clothes. So once again, they placed soap, and salt, and clothes on the very same path and they hid behind the long palm trees with their gendarme (*mbúlú-mbúlú*). They waited until the evening when they saw women and children coming to the water to wash themselves, and to clean marmites and other things women use to prepare food.

And then, the white chief shouted at them: *"You return back to the forest and come back to us with your chief!"* Scared to death, the women and children ran back to *Mássá* saying there are strange people-like creatures

> waiting for him at the riverbank. *Mássá* walked to the river and met the French chief. He was shocked to see the skin so white as only dead people have. He could not say a word, and he just stood and stared. But *Djoubé*, who married *Mássá*'s daughter, and was known for his intelligence, already had heard about what the white people were like. He hurried to the riverbank with two huge elephant tusks. It was good that he hurried so much, because if he had come only few minutes later, *Mássá* would be already dead.
>
> The white chief could not stop staring at elephant tusks. He thought for a while and then he said to *Mássá: "You cannot go back to the forest! You stay here by the river and build your village here. You and all your people come here, or I will kill you all. And I am not afraid to kill! You are going to be chief here and report to me and give me these* [elephant tusks] *each time I pass!"*
>
> And because *Mássá* was already too old, and too tired, he said: *"I can't do this anymore!"* And so he gave his power to *Djoubé*. *Mássá* wasn't only old and tired, he also didn't speak Lingala and *Djoubé* did. And so, *Djoubé* took all the people and all the Pygmies to the riverbank and said*: "You cannot go back to the forest! You stay here or I will kill you all!"* And so the village was created.

This is a Bilo version of the story. I have heard it from four different Bilo informants and synthetised into the story outlined above. This shows how Bilo claimed ownership over Djoubé's Yaka. As Lewis pointed out: *"Mbendjele oppose the way Bilo manipulate history, specifically accounts of first meeting with Yaka, to justify claims to authority over them. Mbendjele do not discuss how they first met Bilo."* (2002: 211). Mbendjele opposed this by claiming that the "BaYaka people of before" (*BàYáká bá bòsó*) were there before Bilo.

Interestingly, Kimbembe (2015: 96) who conducted extensive research with different Yaka groups of North Congo-Brazzaville, and also worked in Djoubé, briefly mentions the story of *"Massa"* too. However, it is striking how different his version is. He states that Massa was actually a Yaka man, inhabiting the region called *"Disimo"* (location of which not specified) – and that he was "captured" by a Bondongo "patriarch" called

"Mohoulé" from Djoubé/Bobanda. Kimbembe further reports that in the neighbouring village of Mombellou, something similar occurred – the patriarch "*Bozoumbou*" "captured" *Mbalanga* and "his" Pygmies. Unfortunately, Kimbembe does not provide further information in terms of sources of this story – as to whether this is a Mbendjele or a Bilo interpretation of events, nor does he remark on its historical validity.

Another legend concerning Djoubé that circulated amongst Bilo was about a "princess" from France who flew in an invisible airplane to Djoubé. Accounts of the princess's motivation for coming over to Djoubé varied. Some people claimed that she came to salute people; or that she came to fetch slaves; and some assumed that she came as a tourist to see elephants. Only after returning from the field did I learn that, in 1942, a military airplane crashed in Mombellou, as a result of which, three people died (Kinata 2016: 115), and that the "airplane" story could be related to this event.

***

Palm oil plantations and cacao fields were the remnants of Djoubé's colonial heritage, which continue to influence the current-day economics of the village. The first cacao plantations in Congo were installed in the 1930s (Vennetier 1963: 212). After gaining independence from France, these fields became the property of the state. However, the Bilo families that had worked these fields began to claim ownership over them. During my field research, I learned that cacao plantations were inherited within families and that the cacao seeds were sold to private companies. Nonetheless, the Bilo complained about the irregularity and non-reliance of these buyers (also mentioned in Komatsu 1998: 152).

As was the case in other villages on the Motaba and Ibenga Rivers (Guillermou 1992), Mbendjele from Djoubé also relied heavily on oil palm plantations (*Elaeis guineensis*). Along the Motaba River, oil palm trees spread naturally as well as with migrations and the creation of villages (Vennetier 1963: 161). Archaeologists documented commencement of oil palm production in Central Africa in the Early-/Mid Holocene (MacEachern 2008: 3). At the beginning of the 20th century, the tending of oil palm trees was encouraged as part of an intensive French colonial trade to supply European demand.

In the village of Bolomo in 1928 (Kinata 2016: 114), Louis Joseph Gitton created a factory for producing palm oil in Likouala (Guillaume 2002: 423), building on previous palm-oil business of a merchant Audier. Gitton was mentioned by my Bilo informants. One of the most popular stories was how he flipped a bag of rice on the shore of one village on the Motaba River, after this incident the village was called *Loso*, which means rice in Lingala. Gitton operated in the region of Epéna and Likouala-aux-Herbes, enjoying an economic monopoly with reported success (Ryckmans 1938: 6). The company ultimately created seventeen branches along the Motaba and Ibenga River, one of them in Djoubé (Guillaume 2002: 949). Oil palm fruits were collected from the local population in exchange for palm oil (Vennetier 1963: 192).

After Gitton's death in early 1960s, there was not any other company with an initiative to produce palm oil. Despite the government's attempts for "rehabilitation" (Guillermou 1992: 79), oil palm fruits continued to be exploited "informally" and products were traded and sold in the local markets or boutiques. Even so, Kaori Komatsu, who conducted research on Bilo food culture in Djoubé (1991-1992 and 1996-1997), reported absence of shop in the village during her research period (1998: 152). During my fieldwork, there was a boutique, owned and managed by a merchant from Niger, who married a Milo woman from Djoubé. The shop was established in 2010.

In general, business and trade was facilitated by river transport. European immigrants based in Impfondo used to hire canoes in Dongou and visited villages in order to buy agricultural and forest products. Vennetier (1963: 233–234) mentions briefly that regular river transport ceased in 1961, apart from occasional travel of departmental officials or missionaries. As Kaori Komatsu (1998: 152) pointed out, dugout canoes with out-board engines functioned once a month during the dry season in 1990s. During the period of my research, public river transport functioned four times a month.

Ethnic and Linguistic Background

Pygmy groups that occupied the area of the Motaba River during 1950s did not refer to themselves as 'Mbendjele'. Bernard Auteroche, a medical student who conducted research in this area, referred to the locals as Bakwà, the Pygmy group (Auteroche 1961: 21) and Bondjo, the Non-Pygmy-African group (Auteroche 1961; Douet 1914).

The term “Bondjo” refers to foreigner or “white person”. By this word “white people” travellers referred to the population of Bas-Oubangui (de Saint-Jean 1912: 161–162).

Hauser (1954: 24) explains that the term “Bondjo(s)” was employed to refer to Bondongo, Botaba and Bounzi, and Bombo people, who were inhabiting the Middle Motaba. Certain resources (Guillaume 2002: 547) refer to Bombo people as the Non-Pygmy African population of Djoubé. Hauser (1954: 24) further elucidates that Bombo originally came from the area of Western Democratic Republic of Congo, left the Motaba River (according to Guillaume (2002: 547) Djoubé and Mombellou) and settled in the villages on the Ibenga River, where they intermarried with Bangandou (Bacadou) people. My Bilo informants from Djoubé reported familial ties with these villages.

In general, Bondjo were described as warrior-like and cannibalistic. They were described to be fiercer and more ruthless than other ethnic groups of French Congo (Augouard 1899: 6–8; Bruel 1899; Castellani 1898a, 1898b; Douet 1914; Rocquain 1913). Castellani (Castellani 1898b: 151–155) described Bondjo women as hideous and ferocious; Carlier, on the other hand, emphasised that the cannibalistic reputation of Bondjo was exaggerated (1899: 247); and Goffart admired Bondjo’s extraordinary skills in canoeing and paddling (1908: 112; for a review of Bondjo colonial image, see Samarin 1984).

Currently, the Motaba River is occupied by three major Bilo ethno-linguistic groups: Kaka occupy the ten upper villages, Bondongo the middle seven villages and Bomitaba the lower fifteen villages (Kano & Asato 1994: 146). During my fieldwork, I interacted with Kaka Yambé Bilo who live in Bangui-Motaba and Bondongo in Djoubé. According to Kinata (2016: 24), Bobanda, Likolo, Nguélé, Bongoye, and Djétonille are Bondongo “subgroups”. Even though Djoubé is also recognised under the name of “Bobanda”, during my fieldwork, people refered to themselves simply as Bondongo. This could have been influenced by the fact that during most of my fieldwork I interacted with Mbendjele and did not establish close relationships with Djoubé’s Bilo. Similar to Kinata, Kimbembe (2015: 96) also mentions that in “*Nzoubé*” Bilo identify themselves as “*Bóbándá Bondongo”* or *“Bondongo-bongouale”* (ibid: 211).

Prior to colonisation, both Kaka and Bondongo ethnic groups lived mainly by hunting and gathering. However, as they were forced to settle on the river banks, their

subsistence strategies changed. Because the colonial trade involved mainly agricultural products, Kaka began to focus on cultivation of plantains and corn, while Bondongo switched to fishing (Guillaume 2002: 31).

During the time of my fieldwork, Non-Pygmy Africans from Djoubé referred to themselves as Bondongo, and local Pygmy populations referred to themselves as Mbendjele BaYaka. Non-Pygmy Africans referred to Pygmies as BaMbenga, and Pygmies referred to non-Pygmy Africans as Bilo (Milo in singular).

Contact with farmer neighbours boosts the multilingual potential of Pygmies. For instance, Mbendjele are in contact with thirteen different agriculturalist groups. Some Pygmy hunter-gatherer groups speak dialects derived from the languages of their neighbours, and some groups speak the actual languages of their neighbours (Bahuchet 2006).

The Kaka Yambe, language spoken in Bangui-Motaba, is classified as Bantu A85 , and is closer to that of Djems of Sangha (Kinata 2016: 23–24). Other Kaka groups living close to Bangui-Motaba are of different Kaka sub-groups. In Makao, the so-called "real Kaka" live – Kaka Ikenga – Kretsinger & Hardin (2003: 128) remarked that the area of Makao is where the Yaka and Bilo population of the Central African village of "Bayanga" come from. In Djingo and Likombo, Kaka Mbokoro live (*"Mbakolo"* in Kimbembe 2015: 210) – their language is closer to that of Gbaya in Central African Republic (Kinata 2016: 23–24).

While Guthrie's classification puts Bondongo and Mbendjee Yaka in one category of Bantu C10, Maho (2009: 25), who reorganised Guthrie's system classifies Bondongo as Bantu C142 and Mbendjee Yaka as C104. The language employed by Mbendjele in Djoubé slightly differed from the language in Bangui-Motaba, as in both cases people used to borrow words from languages of their non-Pygmy African neighbours.

Interethnic Relations

The complexity of relations between Central African hunter-gatherers and farmers has been the subject of a number of studies (Bahuchet & Guillaume 1982; Ben-Ari 1987; Bonhomme et al. 2012; Cholez 1999; Delobeau 1989; Grinker 1990, 1994; Hanawa

2004; Hattori 2014; Joiris 1994, 2003; Kitanishi 2003; Köhler & Lewis 2002; Lewis 2001; Matsuura 2011; Ngima Mawoung 2001, 2016, Rupp 2001, 2003, 2011, Takeuchi 2005, 2014, Terashima 1987, 1998; Toda 2014; C. M. Turnbull 1965).

The Mbendjele and Bilo in Djoubé maintained a patron-client relationship (Bahuchet 1999: 193; Takeuchi 2014: 308), where Bilo acted as pseudo-parents and Mbendjele as pseudo-children. The Bilo asked their "children" to do labour in exchange for food and protection. Takeuchi (2014) pointed out that Bilo-Pygmy ethnic stereotyping is often reflected in insulting antagonistic metaphors (see also Köhler & Lewis 2002). According to my observations, in Bangui-Motaba, Mbendjele tend to refer to Bilo as "gorillas" and Bilo refer to Mbendjele as "chimpanzees". Mbendjele from Djoubé are also familiar with the 'gorilla versus chimpanzee' metaphor. However, there is also preference to refer to a clan animal of the Bilo farmer family, as well.

There are thirteen patrilineal Bilo clans (*dìkándà*) in Djoubé: Bondjala, Bombendu, Budje, Tongombe, Kaya, Mputu, Bondjango, Bondunga, Bokumu, Nkalanga, Bongogi, Bondjando, and the clan of the village chief. Each clan has its own signature taboo animal. Ritual and magical practices of the clan are centred on these animal beings, but their consumption is prohibited. If a Milo woman from the chimpanzee clan marries a man from the gorilla clan, the food taboo prohibitions relate to both animals. However, in-clan belonging is reproduced in a patrilineal way. So, in this case their child would belong to the gorilla clan. In terms of interethnic insults, a Milo from a leopard-clan family would be metaphorically insulted as leopard, or his behaviour would be judged as leopard-like in a negative way.

Nonetheless, interethnic stereotypes can also be of a simple, descriptive form. For example, people can refer to believed physical and character features of the other group. Mbendjele believed that Bilo have "big mouth". This expression was employed two-ways: Bilo were believed to talk a lot, but fail to do what they promised in talking; and despite talking a lot and loud, they were unable to sing (see also Figure 3).

Doremus, who conducted research on the Motaba River, claimed that BaAka reside in the villages and engage in garden labour for Bilo mainly during the dry season when the forest is less abundant in starchy foods (Doremus 2015: 70). From my experience,

during the dry season, Mbendjele spent more time in the forest than in the village, engaging in dam fishing.

Figure 3 The “big” Bilo

This photo was taken during one Bilo-only gathering. Some Mbendjele walked around to see what was going on there, but they were not invited. When I returned to my tent, they were mocking about what Bilo and Bilo feasts are like. One of the metaphor they repeatedly emphasized was how “big” everything related to Bilo is: Bilo are big, they eat big portions of meat with their big hands. They drink from big cups; and they do not sing, despite having “big mouth”.

The types of labour for which the Djoubé Bilo recruited the Mbendjele were varied. Mbendjele men worked on Bilo farms, collected honey, went fishing, tapped palm wine, hunted forest animals[3], harvested oil palm fruits, helped with the construction of houses, cleaned public areas in the village, worked as paddlers when travelling by river and as porters when travelling through the forest, and assisted in ritual and healing practices. Mbendjele women mainly worked on farms, gathered forest products such as wild

[3] Haneul Jang (2017, personal communication, December 1) reported a recent increase in hunting activities. Mbendjele were asked to hunt for Bilo about every two weeks. This meant that whole families went further to the forest and stayed for about ten days. Typically, they killed about 40-50 animals per hunting trip. The families were rewarded in palm wine, tobacco, and clothes. During my fieldwork, I have never encountered with such an intensive bushmeat trade.

yams, wove baskets and mats, helped in preparing cassava flour, assisted in cleaning village public spaces, and helped in food preparation for ritual events and healing practices.

Adolescent boys and girls usually joined their parents in their work, or Bilo assigned them different tasks of their own. Younger children stayed in the village with the elders, mostly with grandmothers, or mothers with newly born babies. However, children were also requested to do services for or on behalf of Bilo: mainly assisting in delivering, spreading and receiving messages, or they were asked to bring, take, hold, hand or give objects, tools, or foods to certain people.

The Mbendjele in Bangui-Motaba were paid for their labour in alcohol. This created dependency and exacerbated alcoholism (for Pygmy use of psychoactive substances, see Roulette 2010; Roulette, Hagen, et al. 2016; Roulette, Kazanji, et al. 2016). Bangui-Motaba is situated close to the administrative centre of the logging company called "STC". The full name of the company is *Société Thanry Congo*. It is a Chinese-owned logging company, belonging to the Vicwood Group, which operates in Republic of Congo, Cameroon and Central African Republic. The village, which emerged in the area after the establishment of this company is referred to by two names: *Sombo* or *Thanry. Sombo* has a concentrated population of people from various departments of Republic of Congo, as well as neighbouring countries, such as Central African Republic and Cameroon.

Merchants from the town of Sombo (Thanry) would regularly buy palm wine from Bangui-Motaba Bilo. Eventually, the collection of palm wine was handled by the Mbendjele, as part of their labour for Bilo. In return, they were paid in strong distilled liquor called *ŋgólóŋgóló*[4]. In general, drinking alcohol served to fulfil various functions in the local Mbendjele community: it was perceived as a means of peace-making; it encouraged them to harder work; it made people stronger; it gave them courage to face the problems; it made children stronger and healthier; or it put them to sleep. Alcohol was also believed to help in finding a spouse.

[4] In Djoubé known as *lütükú.* It is produced from cassava and corn. Carlier (1899: 394) mentions popularity of this alcohol among Bondjos at the end of 19th century and calls it *pë.*

In contrast with Bangui-Motaba, Bilo from Djoubé paid Mbendjele in lighter forms of alcohol. A usual daily rate was one cigarette, one litre of palm wine or a *"package"* of cannabis (*ɓómbà wà mòndʒóndʒó*). Each of these substances had a market value of approximately £0.13 (= 100 FCFA).

However, the value of payment varied, depending on the relationship between Milo and the Mbendjele, the nature of the work, and the length of time spent working. For example, in exchange for a three-day hunting trip, a Mbendjele man could receive as many as twenty cigarettes. Women were often rewarded in tobacco, as well, but often consumed just a small part of it and kept the rest for their husbands. Children worked without a payment or a different form of reward.

Mbendjele rarely had direct contact with cash (see also Figure 4). And if so, they are likely to spend it on alcohol or tobacco (Kitanishi 2006; Köhler 2005). Bilo, however, could easily engage in shopping in the local boutique, as they received cash from the regular sale of agricultural products to the merchants passing by the village, or in the Sombo (Thanry) market. They mainly sold cassava flour, oil palm, smoked fish in baskets and bushmeat. Often, after selling these products, they bought large amounts of spirit alcohol, such as whiskey or pastis, cigarettes and cannabis.

Besides personal consumption, cannabis and cigarettes were also used as a payment for Mbendjele labour. For example, one roll of cannabis bought in Sombo (Thanry) would cost £6.6 (= 5000 FCFA) and it was enough to produce about 50-75 small packages of cannabis. Given the fact that the Mbendjele received one package for a day of labour, Bilo could afford to employ one Mbendjele for 50-75 days.

Apart from direct labour for Bilo, Mbendjele engaged in the exchange of forest foods in order to get certain psychoactive substances or specific garden foods from Bilo. The bartering of forest and agricultural products has been reported in various studies concerning different Pygmy and Bilo groups in Central Africa (Bahuchet & Guillaume 1982; Burrows 1898: 188; Douet 1914; Foà 1900: 229; Guillaume 1991; Ichikawa 1991; Lupo 2016; Oishi & Hayashi 2014; Riddell 2013; Colin Turnbull 1965; Wilkie & Curran 1993).

Figure 4 Mbendjele girls at the “route nationale”

Mbendjele children often travelled to the places where they could earn some cash. This picture is from the road-building site between Sombo (Thanry) and Enyelle. They assisted in gathering foods and cooking for the road-builders. Children from Djoubé also used to travel to earn some money, but their most preferred place was Sombo (Thanry), where they could buy sweets and biscuits by selling *Marantaceae* leaves to local Bilo.

While Mbendjele from Djoubé cultivated gardens, the preference for psychoactive substances was predominant in these exchanges (Oishi & Hayashi 2014: 157). Most of the families I worked with relied on their own crops to a certain extent peppers (for studies of different Pygmy populations growing crops for their own consumption, see Kitanishi 1995, 2003; Leclerc 2012; Soengas López 2010; Yasuoka 2012, 2013). They produced palm nuts, plantains, sweet bananas, cassava, taro, sweet potatoes, papayas, and chilli. Their fields were situated within the range of approximately 2-3km walking distance from the village.

Responsibilities for tending to gardens, as well as the garden products themselves, were shared within families. This prevented people from leaving for “too long”, unless the responsibilities of guardianship had been clearly delegated in advance. However, this role of “guardianship” was more symbolic than a real role. For example, before a family

went for a fishing trip, an elderly man or woman would shout out loud a public speech (*mòsámbò*) about how he or she or someone else would be coming back regularly to check on their gardens. It served as a warning that others may not come and simply gather their foods. Despite the fact that some members of the family came back and forth to their garden to see and also to gather some foods, this speech served rather as a sharing of awareness of their potential anger if others ate their food. It also emphasised that the food, which was almost matured, should be eaten by this family. I even experienced that some Mbendjele families gathered unripe foods before leaving for a longer time in order to prevent others from eating it.

The most frequently eaten food obtained from own gardens was a cassava leaves meal called *dʒàbùká.* Being abundant and available whole-year-round, the preparation of *dʒàbùká* was the quickest and the most effortless available food. The leaves were shredded and boiled in water with salt. The meal was mixed with raw palm nut oil prepared while the leaves were cooking and served with roasted plantain or yam. Equivalent to this dish was to replace cassava leaves with *Gnetum* leaves from the forest. Most of other types of food come from the forest, as the cultivation of gardens became just one of the Mbendjele subsistence activities. Not all the families had gardens. Some individuals were known for refusing to engage in such "pointless" work, or they explained that they disliked working out in the sun, and preferred to stay in the forest to hunt and gather foods, and exchange it then for garden products. Combined with working in their own and Bilo fields, women engaged in hunting small animals, dam fishing, and gathering of forest food, wild yams, nuts and seeds, fruit, mushrooms. Men collected honey, harvest palm nuts, tapped palm wine, hunted or trapped forest animals, or fished with rods, nets or spears.

My Mbendjele informants liked both the forest and the village for different reasons. While the forest was generally described as calm, peaceful, happier, and full of food, in the village there were many dramatic events happening, such as an abundance of cigarettes and alcohol, bigger ceremonies and parties, many visitors coming with different goods, gossips and fights, etc. The village was also referred to as *"a place where people hide a lot"*, given the larger number of people present and larger distances between the houses. From September/October starts the fishing season (*kómbì*) so Mbendjele families spent most of this time in the forest. They used to return to the village around the Christmas and New Year's time (*lè fétì*) and stay till June/July when

the honey season begins. In-between the fishing and honey seasons, Mbendjele liked to camp close to their fields. These were situated within four kilometres from the village. This allowed the forest and garden foods in hand.

When specific events arose, such as the death of a Milo, the whole Mbendjele community was expected to suspend their daily routines and adjust their activities in order to hunt and gather large amounts of food, make a coffin, dig a grave and prepare for three or more days of ritual performances. In such cases, those people who were camped in the forest were also asked to come back to village and participate in these activities as well. These events were understood as a special timeframe of when amicable aspects of Mbendjele-Bilo relations were manifested. Mbendjele enjoyed being respected for their skills in dancing and singing (Djenda 1968; Lewis 2002). Additionally, Bilo supported Mbendjele in healing serious illnesses, often believed to be caused by sorcery.

What Mbendjele valued in respect to Bilo was their protection against Congolese officials. In Djoubé, there was an absence of state representatives (such as national police or national gendarmerie) who could possibly assist in human rights protection and manage local conflicts by enforcing the laws of Congo-Brazzaville. However, based on previous negative and discriminative behaviour, Mbendjele distrusted state institutions, which were habitually in the hands of Bilo. According to interviews with my key informants, they would avoid contacting state representatives in search of legal help in cases when the officials were in Djoubé. Put simply, Mbendjele feared state authorities. When a police visit was announced, Mbendjele would leave to the forest in order to avoid any sort of contact, even if they had not committed any crime. Often, Bilo patrons in Djoubé assisted in the protection of Mbendjele in such cases.

Mbendjele also approached Bilo patrons when seeking arbitration in the conflicts among Mbendjele. The village chief normally nominated an elder for a position of the village judge. Mbendjele would then use this judge to help with the resolution of certain problems. For example, there was one man who wanted to divorce his wife, because he had fallen in love with someone else and could not reach an agreement with his wife about how to take care of their children. He went to the judge who decided that the man had to pay his wife in meat and honey and that the children should stay with their mother.

Intermarriage. Yaka-Bilo relations that occur are rare in Western Pygmy groups. And if occur, they are hypergamic – Bilo men engage in relationships with Pygmy women, and not vice-versa (2014). Hypergamic marriages are common also in Efe (Bailey & Aunger 1995), Bongo (Knight 2003; Matsuura 2006: 87), and Bakoya Pygmy groups (Soengas López 2010) so as in Hadza and Okiek hunter-gatherers (Leonard 1997: 72). Mbendjele consider Bilo men as reckless and half-hearted sexual exploiters of Mbendjele women, transmitters of sexual diseases (*bòkóŋìò yà ènèkέ*)[5]. During my fieldwork, I have witnessed several cases of relationships between Bilo men and Mbendjele women. I did not, however, encounter or hear of a relationship between an Mbendjele man and Milo woman. However, such instances can occasionally occur These affairs often remain private (J Lewis, 2016, email communication, November 22).

*

The following chapter presents details of employed fieldwork methods, but also challenges that I encountered with.

[5] Study among the Baka suggests that Baka were three times more likely to get HIV if having sex with the Bantu (Essomba et al. 2015).

3 FIELDWORK METHODS & CHALLENGES

This chapter aims to discuss data collection methods as well as challenges that I encountered with in the field. These sorts of discussions are also important, since they can have an impact on the nature of data collection and on how methods and techniques are adjusted to particular cultural contexts. Even though most ethnographers in the social anthropology tradition will attempt some reflexivity to the nature of their informants and the limitations of their fieldwork, these sorts of discussions are often taking a form of "funny fieldwork stories", prior-fieldwork supervisor-to-student advices, or student "couloir" conversations. See Table 5 for a summary of fieldwork challenges mentioned by scholars working with Congo Basin hunter-gatherers.

Balancing Participation and Observation

Participant observation (Spradley 1980) and free, non-structured interviews (Bernard 2011) were the main methods I used in obtaining research data. Participant observation has been one of anthropology's hallmark methodologies (Atkinson 2015; Bernard 2011; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007; Kawulich 2005; O'Reilly 2008; Spradley 1980) since the work of Malinowski (2014). However, this term presents a practical problem. 'Participation' and 'observation' refer to two distinct activities, which are complementary only to a certain extent. Full engagement in participation excludes full engagement in observation, and vice versa (Murchison 2010). The collection of specific sorts of data requires different types of engagement in participation and observation. While certain activities only require observation, others demand rather active participation.

I accompanied women when going digging yams, dam fishing, helped in setting up camps, building huts. At the beginning, even such a thing as walking in the forest was not an easy task. I cultivated my skills in processing and preparation of the food – fetching and transporting water, or making, maintaining and regulating a fire, learning how to use tools to prepare meals such as slicing wild *Gnetum* leaves with a machete, shredding cassava leaves with using a stick with thorns, or pounding palm oil fruits with large pestle and mortar. I attempted to engage in as many activities as possible. Crafting

skills were essential, too. Women taught me how to weave baskets and mats, make jewellery, prepare make-up pigments or for example how to make and dye raffia skirts.

Participation in daily activities was crucial in terms of gaining, but also in *maintaining* respect and trust of my informants. I learned this when I began to lose my initial excitement for participant observation and started to employ more formal research techniques (largely because of physical exhaustion). For example, instead of joining women in searching for food, I stayed behind to play with children and actively observe their daily activities. I wrote down jottings and commentaries in my notebook more frequently than I would have done had I been working on digging yams, fishing or engaging in other physically demanding activities. Also, because of the lack of privacy, around noon each day I retired to my tent and wrote up a more elaborate pre-analysis of my observations.

Mbendjele did not like this change in my attitude. I noticed how people talked about me when visitors from distant places passed by, or when distant relatives came for a long visit. One of the first things they would say is: *"She knows to work hard. She knows dam fishing! Yesterday, she found a lot of fish!"* But when I did not work and tried to improve my subsistence skills, they would not say much. What they did say would be along the following lines: *"She only writes in notebook. But she has a lot of salt! Ask her so she shares with you."* Also, they spoke about it loudly in the their *mòsámbò* in the mornings and evenings. I could not follow this completely at the beginning of my research. However, from those few words I understood I would develop my own interpretation. For example, I would hear them shouting: 'the white' (*Mòndélé*), 'lazy' (*máki*), 'sharing' (*kàbá*) in a long speech and I would think that I did not share and work enough. This led me to ask myself each time what I had done wrong and to try and be as nice as possible and participate in Mbendjele daily life as much as I could.

This confusion stems largely from Mbendjele perspective on pure observational research – it is not 'work' or a meaningful activity. By participation in subsistence activities I actively contributed to the economics of the group – it was regarded as a work by my informants. Work in Mbendjele terms is the kind of activity that results in something material or consumable. By 'material' I mean something one is able to see, or touch. For example, making a basket is 'work' because this activity results in a product – a basket, which one can see, touch, and eventually use for various purposes

for few months. Something consumable in this context is food – a direct outcome of hunting or gathering. And because notebooks are useless in staving off hunger or a proper material to weave baskets, “writing in a notebook” is rejected to be perceived as work (see Figure 5 for an illustration of pointlessness of writing made by *Mbúmà*).

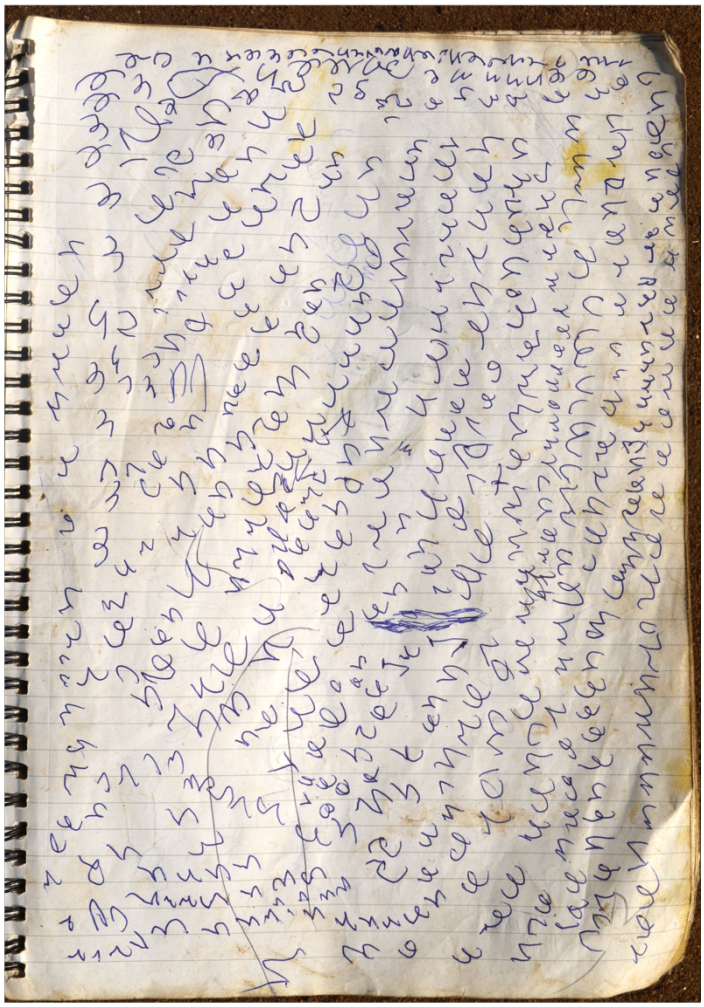

Figure 5 Pointlessness of writing

I continued with participant observation techniques, but did not focus only on technical skills. Being actively engaged within *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà* events was key to my understanding of functioning of these institutions. Table 4 shows some examples of my participation within these three institutions. It was very important not to engage in these institutions only as an observer, but to try out performing, too, as people gave me feedback about my performances and I was able to learn about how proper performances should and should not look like.

Table 4 Some examples of my active participation within *mòsámbò, mòádʒò,* and *màssánà*

Mòsámbò	*Mòádʒò*	*Màssánà*
• Announcements about my travelling and shopping plans. • Delivering messages from different villages. • Complaints & criticisms about people's behaviours towards me ("demanding too much") • Thanking for help & cooperation.	• Dealing with people's demands that felt overwhelming. • Mimicking people who notoriously infringed my privacy. • Dealing with unwanted gifts and marriage proposals (see also Bombjaková 2016).	• Learning and playing children games. • Participation in preparations of communal *mòkóndì màssánà* activities • Attempts in performing singing, dancing, and drumming. • Meetings in a "secret path"

Interview Techniques

While conducting standard ethnographic semi-structured interviews (Bernard 2011; Spradley 1979) proved to be an effective research technique when studying ORA formal schooling, it turned out to be problematic with my Mbendjele informants. For example, Mbendjele views associated with *èkílà* are extremely sensitive to discuss. Such information require fluency in language, established trust in relationships, and knowledge of culturally-sensitive manners of communication. Cultural-sensitive ways of conducting interviews and asking question was the key. The following is an example when I learned about this:

> *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* and *Àndʒɛ́lɛ́* surprised me today. A bunch of young BaYaka, holding a radio that was playing loud Lingala music approached us as I was following *Bɔ́kɔ́, Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá's* brother, making a knife. One of those young men had a black pigment ornament painted around his eye. I stood up and asked:

- *'What do you want?'*
- *'Money!'*

- *'Why?'*
- *'Because of bòkúbá!'*

Because this word wasn't in my vocabulary list, I looked at *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* and *Àndʒɛ́lɛ́* (a couple from BM). They looked at each other with smile, *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* took me aside and said that he wants *bòkúbá* for his son *Àŋgàndá*, pointed to his penis and made a gesture as if he was cutting it. I was shocked and wasn't prepared for this, but I asked how much it costs. "1000." I said okay. At that moment, *Àŋgàndá* was smiling. One of the older, more experienced boy said that he wasn't going to be smiling for much longer. From that point on, everything happened very fast. *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* grabbed *Àŋgàndá*, who was already crying for his life. The father did not say anything, neither smiled, neither cried, his face was very serious. Other men who were around took a mat and all the men went behind *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá's* hut.

Six men were holding poor *Àŋgàndá*. The professional circumciser used a new razor to cut the foreskin. During the act, two adolescent boys drummed on empty containers, which we usually use for fetching water. It all took about four minutes. *Àŋgàndá* was screaming and when it finished, the drumming finished, too. Then, *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* took his son to their hut and *Àndʒɛ́lɛ́* took a bucket of water to clean him. Afterwards, they held him over the fire to stanch the bleeding. *Àndʒɛ́lɛ́* also applied a special medicine called *mòbeí* (*Annonidium mannii*) to the wound. *Bɔ́kɔ́* took *Àŋgàndá's* foreskin and hung it on the branch of a nearby cocoa tree (we were in the village). He remarked: *"We bury it tomorrow."*

Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá and the other men sat in front of the hut, chatting, smoking and drinking wine. I thought that this would be a good opportunity to talk about circumcision in general and so began interviewing them. Here are some of the findings:

- The men dutifully explained that every man in the village underwent circumcision and that each one buried his foreskin under his own plantain tree. They also explained in graphic detail that the plantain was a symbol of manhood and each man needed to tend to his plantain tree so that he could perform well in his sexual life.
- When I asked about their own plantain trees, they would point out nearby trees. Also, they emphasised that only men can consume these plantains,

> women can only cook them. If a woman eats the fruits of his husband's plantain tree, it would harm their marital sexual life. Additionally, *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* explained that now *Àŋgàndá* had become a man and was not a boy anymore. One of the signs of being a man was that he would now eat food from the same plate as other men.

I carefully wrote down everything they told me and felt very satisfied with the valuable and interesting information I had gleaned from this event. After a few months, however, one man happened to pass through the village, saying he carried out circumcisions. I soon noticed he did not have the markings of black pigment around his eyes. And, after the circumcision, the family did not bury the skin – neither did they plant a new plantain tree.

I could not sleep that night and so decided to visit an elderly man who had participated in my earlier interview. I asked him why it was that this family had not buried their son's foreskin under a plantain tree. The man stared at me blankly before suddenly bursting into tears, laughing so wildly that he had trouble breathing. With tears in his eyes he told me:

"You wanted us to talk, so we talked to you a lot, a lot!" This man did not hesitate to call on the others who had taken part in the interview. Throughout that night, the quiet was broken by peals and roars of laughter. I wasn't the only one who could not sleep.

It is possible that these Mbendjele men were just entertaining themselves and took pleasure in inventing these 'typical Mbendjele circumcision traditions', while enjoying some wine and tobacco together. Additionally, as this elderly man said: *"I wanted them to talk."* They had sensed how keen I was to obtain as much data as possible. So they did what they thought I was expecting them to. However, following certain simple principles made it easier to prevent my informants from formulating answers designed to please me or to reinforce my opinions or ambitions. Firstly, I would refrain from showing excitement as I asked my questions. I would try to avoid creating a special 'interview atmosphere'.

I tried to ensure my questions took as natural a form as possible, including by phrasing them as though incidental to the topic under discussion. I tried not to ask more than two

questions in the same conversation, and, if possible, confine conversations to a private setting 'between the four eyes'. Lewis (2009: 241) defines this speech as follows:

"This type of speech is the preferred style for communicating sensitive, secret, personal and profound subjects. It only occurs between two people. Such speech characteristically occurs in the forest and is whispered or muttered using a low tone of voice and monotone pronunciation. As the subject becomes more and more personal or sensitive speakers tend to omit consonants, leaving only tone and vowels, and multiple possible meanings, so that even if overheard it is very difficult to understand what has been said."[6]

By this I mean that I would not sit down and I would not ask the questions as if I am interviewing. But if something special happened like was this instance of circumcision, I would firstly observe what is happening, I would listen to people's conversations and later in the day, when the 'special event' is over, I would be for example in the forest with the women dam fishing I would start asking: I would be making a dam with *Mbúmà*, I would ask her one or two questions about the event. Then I would be empting dam with *Àɸélà* and ask her one or two questions about the event. Then I would be resting on the shore with young mother breastfeeding her baby and ask her one or two questions. Later in the night I would be listening to the *mòsámbò* and see if the event is mentioned in it and ask someone who stands close to: *'Is it about the event?'* Then, amazing source of information were always children – I would ask one or two questions to children playing nearby.

From all of this information I would get the picture and then keep verifying it with different individuals over longer period of times. I would no longer 'sit down' to 'talk' and ask many questions. I would just ask 'by the way' as if showing not too much interest in it. If I show I am too interested in something and want to talk a lot about it, that's when making up stories starts. These short and 'in situ' interviews were contextualized in ordinary activity and limited and reduced by cultural conventions that see questions as an invasion of someone's privacy and autonomy. This approach made the talk more natural and less contrived, adapted to my informant's expectations and cultural context. Importantly, employing formal interviewing about technical

[6] See also Aunger (2004: 152) who practiced similar technique of "isolation of the informant" in order to conduct interviews in the Ituri forest of Democratic Republic of Congo.

knowledge, such as naming lists of animals, and in general questions about ecological knowledge might work. I would employ these techniques in issues related to opinions about religion, or anything related to symbolic, cultural issues that are more sensitive and problematic to be discussed.

Methods of Language Learning

Learning Mbendjee Yaka was particularly challenging. I avoided hiring a Bilo translator to avoid the negative influence it may have had on the behaviour of my informants (Lewis 2002: 16; Widlok & Woodburn 2002: 10–11). Thus, I arranged one week intensive language course in Pokola in order to improve my ability to understand the language basics. A Mbendjele man, *Mbámù,* was my teacher. After the course, we continued to work together in Bangui-Motaba and Djoubé. Our original plan was to work for the next two months, but he fell in love with an Mbendjele girl from Djoubé and stayed longer. Even though the "language course" was very beneficial, it did not turn out to be as productive as I expected. For the initial three to four months I would mark down what people seemed to be saying, and tried to employ those expressions in what I thought were similar contexts. If they laughed, I assumed that the expression was not the correct one.

After the evening meal by the firelight we would play "pronunciation games". Someone would create a phrase in Mbendjee Yaka – the longer and the more complicated the better. Then, I would try to pronounce it as accurately as possible, paying attention to the melody, speed, and gestures. After this, I would attempt to guess and pantomime the meaning of the sentence or try to apply it in a fictive scenario. This game had several variations. For instance, on gathering trips, women from Bangui-Motaba would say something what is typical to Djoubé and the women from Djoubé would imitate the speech style of the Mbendjele from Bangui-Motaba. My role was again to try to say it as precisely as possible. Similarly, I would say something in my maternal tongue Slovak, then translate it in Mbendjee Yaka – and others would translate it into Lingala, or Bondongo. I played this game with children throughout the day and with the adults during the evenings. The key was the laughter associated with making mistakes, impossibilities to pronounce the phrases or on the contrary – if I managed to repeat it with precision. My theatre caused hilarity and apart from learning the language, these events were very bonding.

While in the field, I reached fluency in Mbendjee Yaka. However, I grasped the grammatical rules rather "intuitively". Studying the languge in detail after returning from the field has shed considerable light on many of the issues that I did not understand fully in the field. Through micro-analysis of people's speech by making careful transcriptions and transliterations, and learning about the semantics of Bantu prefixes helped in understanding literal meanings of people's expressions as well as understanding the metaphors of ripening.

Learning about Ripening

In May 2014, I collaborated on a research project with Christophe Boesch and his colleagues from the Primatology Department at the Max Planck Institute. We were interested in understanding Mbendjele nut-cracking activities and skills. Methodologically, we would map *Panda* and *Irvingia* nut trees and conduct focal follows of nut-cracking, including techniques of nut-opening and efficiencies in opening nuts (see Boesch et al. 2017).

Being isolated from my principal research focus (for about a month and half) also taught me something relevant to my own interests. While in search of nuts, I had a chance to see how Mbendjele made analogies between human life-cycle and the life-cycles of the trees and other "beings" in the forest. Thus, this collaborative work was particularly beneficial, as it sparked further conversations concerning "ripening" and "growing". This does not mean that I would not hear these metaphors earlier on. However, repeated conversations about individual trees made me realise their importance as well as helped in understanding my informants' past commentaries on human learning and maturing.

In February 2015, shortly before the end of my fieldwork, I helped Haneul Jang, Boesch's student, to start up her own research. Haneul stayed in Djoubé and worked and lived with many of the informants as I did. I felt privileged that I could keep abreast of news from Djoubé even after my departure, knowing that Haneul was there. I found it vital to consult Haneul on this thesis – she shared her opinions about the claims that I had made about our informants. Results of our discussions and her additional commentaries are included in this thesis with her permission.

Table 5 Examples of fieldwork challenges in Pygmy hunter-gatherer publications

Challenges	**Publications**
Avoidance in unwanted marriage proposals	Turnbull (1961: 141)
Difficulties with ethnographic interviews	Aunger (1994, 2004) Turnbull (1965a:233) Leonhardt (1999: 31) Lewis (2001: 19) Meehan (2005: 74)
Emotional responses to discriminative behaviours towards studied community	Kidd (2008: 19–25)
Fieldwork challenges during Ebola outbreak	Hewlett and Hewlett (2008)
Negative impacts of hiring Bilo interpreters	Carpaneto and Germi (1989: 9) Lewis (2002: 13)
Issues of farmer-Pygmy jealousy	Grinker (1994: xiii)
Gaining trust of informants	Paulin (2007: 167–8)
Payments to informants	Turnbull (1961: 30) Doremus (2015: 77)
Informants' expectations on researcher based on previous visits of Europeans	Lewis (2002: 16) Kisliuk (1998: 22)
Difficulties in learning language of informants	Lewis (2002: 17)
Problems of asking questions	Lewis (2002: 19)
Problems with sharing and gifts	Kisliuk (1998: 23)
Ethical dilemmas concerning giving medical help and sharing medicine	Peacock (1985: 73–74)

Other Challenges

Some of the issues that I initially struggled with resembled problems that had been already mentioned or discussed by other researchers who worked with Central African hunter-gatherers (Table 5). For example, my desire to work and spend of my time with the Mbendjele aroused jealousy on the part of Bilo from Djoubé. People were asking *why only Mbendjele should be interesting to work with.* These tensions diminished over time, mainly as I have established trades with Bilo – I would buy their garden foods, fish, eggs, meat, and palm wine. My decision to learn the Lingala language was also very beneficial. Lingala is an official language of Congo-Brazzaville. Each village has its own language (*patois*), but Lingala serves as interethnic lingua franca throughout the country (Leitch 2005). By being proficient in Lingala, I gained respect and admiration from the Bilo, which helped in negotiations when buying supplies, facilitating transport and diminishing jealousy.

Further, Mbendjele had expectations to work for me and to receive wages. This was largely based on their previous experiences with visitors and foreigners (see Table 6 for a list of visitors and scholars in Djoubé). I did pay several women for regularly sharing part of their meals and on our journeys through the forest for transportation of my baggage. Apart from these "wages", I contributed to the economy of the group by my active participation in fishing and gathering as well as regularly supplied the group with e.g. salt, sugar, spices, peanut oil, rice, and pasta. While getting these everyday supplies, I was also buying gifts for my informants: machetes, cooking pots, clothing, cosmetics, which we usually discussed prior my departure to the nearest town.

Similar to the experience of Peacock (1985: 73-74), some people expected that I might be a medic and can treat people's illnesses. I consulted a medical doctor Marianne Reimert who was at that time working in the hospital of a logging company in Pokola. She advised me on some simple tips that were helpful while avoiding the risks of "healing" when I wasn't a healer. This included cleaning wounds, sharing medication against intestinal worms, and treat children's diarrhoea with zinc dissolving tablets. I regularly took photographs and got information on some serious illnesses and shared it with Marianne. This approach let me to help and at the same time, avoid negative consequences if "healing" without expertise.

Table 6 List of previous researchers in Djoubé.

Researcher(s)	**Field of Study**	**Fieldwork Time**
Lalouel (1949, 1950)	Anthropometry and demographic studies	1945, 1946, 1947
Auteroche (1961)	Anthropometry and general ethnography	1958
Kano and Asato (1994)	Hunting pressure on gorilla	1992-1993
Komatsu (1998)	Food cultures of shifting cultivators	1991-1992; 1996-1997
Michael Nichols (2005)	Photography for National Geographic Creative	1999
Hanawa (2004)	Relationship between shifting cultivators and hunter-gatherers on the Motaba River	1991-1992; 1996-1997
Riddell (2013)	Impacts of conservation and commercial forestry on livelihoods of Bondongo, Kaka and Aka	2011-2012
Kimbembe (2015)	"Oral histories", inter-ethnic relations, historically-informed ethnography	1990s-?
Doremus (2015)	Effectiveness of voluntary forest certification	2012
Amelia Meier	Mbendjele nut-cracking activities	2014
Haneul Jang	Mbendjele way-finding abilities, long-term episodic memory, ecological knowledge	2015-2016
Adam Boyette (2017)	Mbendjele and Bondongo fatherhood	2015 - ongoing
Sheina Lew-Levy	Focal observations of children groups, cultural transmission	2016 - ongoing

What I have learned that mattered the most in establishing good relationships and gaining trust, was my genuine and continuous interest in people, their relationships, their language, and learning and participating in their work and their daily lives.

Mbendjele shared my joy as I gradually improved my language and forest skills and I felt privileged by being so welcomed by these wonderful people.

My Informants

The presence of my friends from Bangui-Motaba in the village Djoubé caused issues of jealousy. Despite my attempts to give the same attention to Mbendjele from Djoubé as to people from Bangui-Motaba, conflicts inevitably arose. In the meantime, I got very close with one elderly woman from Djoubé *Mbúmà*. When we went to the forest, it was always with her family, plus people from Bangui-Motaba. As conflicts began to arise more frequently, my Mbendjele friends from Bangui-Motaba decided to leave. Afterwards, I stayed with *Mbúmà* and her family for the rest of my fieldwork. She became my key informant, best friend, and teacher (see Figure 6, and Figure 7).

At first, *Mbúmà* caught my attention with her sarcastic commentaries on the poor parenting style of mothers from Bangui-Motaba. But as an informant she became particularly intriguing when I learned that she was a well-respected healer in the region. Her specialised knowledge in childbirth, parenting, marriage, female health, and couples' therapies was vital to my research interests and I felt privileged that she was interested in working with me too. I especially appreciated her straightforward manner of explaining issues that arose in the group, and mainly during the period when I wasn't proficient in Mbendjee Yaka.

Mbúmà, her older sister *Nìɛ̀lɛ̀kɛ́* and younger brother *Bɔ̀bílà* were three children of a celebrated Mbendjele female healer, whose renown is still talked about today (I arrived in the field about four years after she passed away). *Mbúmà*'s mother was also skilled in practices of Bilo sorcery and Bilo feared her as a result. It was *Mbúmà's* mother who played the central role in teaching and initiating her daughter as a healer. *Mbúmà* always talked positively about her childhood. She used to recall only one negative incident, when she almost lost her life after a large tree fell on her while she was playing with other children in the forest. She was left with a scar on her head as a reminder of this event.

Mbúmà was married twice. She described her first husband as a good, healthy, and intelligent man. She remarked that his death was so sudden and unexpected that it had

to be because he was poisoned by a Milo. She was left alone with three daughters: *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́*, *Àɸélà*, and *Dʒàbà* – she described this as the hardest period of her life. Her life became happier when she met *Bɔ̀kùndù.* His first wife had also passed away and he was left with one son, *Kùmù*.

Mbúmà once remarked that she would never leave *Bɔ̀kùndù*, even if a young and beautiful man were to present himself. *Mbúmà* fell in love with him deeply ever since he proved himself to be a wonderful step-father to her children and helped her when she needed it the most. They raised the children from their previous marriages and had two more children of their own – a son *Dʒínò* and the youngest, daughter *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀*.

I spent most of my time with *Mbúmà* and her daughters *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́*, *Àɸélà*, and *Dʒàbà* and their families, and *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀,* who was a single mother and did not have much luck in relationships. I worked also with *Mbúmà*'s siblings *Bɔ̀bílà* and *Nìɛ̀lɛ̀kɛ́* and their families, too, but our relationships weren't as close as with *Mbúmà* and her daughters.

The closest interaction during the field was with *Mbúmà*, however, I was interacting with other eight females on a daily basis. They were aged between approximately 25-45 years, and all of them had children. I regularly conducted interviews, structured as I described at the beginning of the chapter, as well as engaged in many female group activities and conversations. Engagement in the daily lives of female groups was my major source of data (this is also why this thesis presents mostly the adult female perspective). However, this does not mean that I would not be interested in other members of the community. I worked with husbands of these females, too. These interactions, however, were mostly limited to conversations taking place in the mornings before they left the camp or village, in the evenings when they were discussing issues of the days, and on special occasions – such as communal ritual activities.

I have also spent considerable amount of the time with children, too. However, mostly when some other adult females were present. Children, however, where very important in drawing my attention to important incidents taking place in the community and in understanding their perspective on ORA schools.

Figure 6 *Mbúmà*

It's just a typical morning in Djoubé. The grandmother is going to cook a little something for herself before heading to the forest. *Mbúmà* explained me issues none wanted to even talk about. Throughout this thesis, you will hear a lot from this remarkable woman.

Figure 7 Young *Mbúmà*

Courtesy of Kaori Komatsu, who conducted research on Bondongo food culture in 1990s. The photo was taken in 1997. *Mbúmà*, second from the left, sits in front of her own house. Haneul Jang shown this photograph to *Mbúmà*. However, she did not recognise herself, nor her children. She also claimed that there are only Bilo in the picture (there is only one – a man sitting in the chair).

4 HOW HUMANS RIPEN?

Mbendjele distinguish various *pathways* of *sharing wisdom* that *ripen* people's bodies and minds as they pass through life. The forest is an underlying inspiration for metaphors that underpin these learning and developmental processes. This chapter seeks to unfold and describe these metaphors by building on interviews with my informants as well as exploiting observations of everyday interactions of the children and adults.

I utilise Mbendjele terms in an attempt to achieve *"better ethnographic sense of the studied other"* (Bird-David 2008: 527), as well as to avoid interferences of English terms, such as "teaching", "learning", "education", "parental goals", or "child development" to Mbendjele specific understandings of similar processes. English terms will be problematized and contrasted with the Mbendjele metaphors, and the theoretical interpretations and observations of other anthropologists on these issues will be woven into this discussion.

"Child", "Adult" and "Forest" in Discourse of Ripening

After wide misreading of her "The Giving Environment" paper, Bird-David suggested that: *"even basic everyday words such as father, mother, and children—perhaps <u>especially</u> such words—embody ontological intuitions and ways of seeing the social world that have to be addressed for ethnographic performance to be effective."* (2008: 526; emphasis added). Thus, before untying the metaphors that grip meanings of people's ripening, I will explain in what ways the Mbendjele concepts of "child" (*mò-nà*) and "adult" (*àkòkáné*) recur *within* the discourse of ripening, since the discussion that follows reflects on this Mbendjele emic view. Mbendjele perceptions on and relations with the forest (*ndímá*) need to be understood, too, since the forest is the abounding and enduring source of inspiration for these metaphors.

Table 7 “Child” and “adult” in the Mbendjele discourse of ripening

Terms	Life-stages	Ripening	Description
“Adult”	*kòtɔ́ akòtɔ́ané / kòmbétì / mò-kókè*		elder
	àkòkáné		adult (‘of enough’)
			Ripeness
	àpóngáné / mándʒì		adolescents
	mònà sàná nà bànà		child plays with other children
	mònà àbombà mònà		child takes care of child
	mònà tàmbwàkó		child walks
“Child”	*mònà gàtú-gàtú*		child walks on four
	mònà kílíkílí		child all over the place
	mònà màbó		child needs to be held
	mònà ɲìngàŋá		child wallows
	mòlépé		toddler
	èléngè		newborn baby
	mòéfè		unborn child
	dʒòánì		embryo

As Table 7 shows, “ripening” posits a dichotomy between those who are ripe (“adult/s”) and those who are unripe (“child/ren”). Ripening is a gradual process, but once one reaches ripeness, it stops. Thus, people can refer to somebody as unripe (“the child”) whenever from second month in utero till the “being of enough” (reaching adulthood), despite of the “life-stages” that children pass through during the process. However, this does not mean that Mbendjele would not discern distinctive “life-stages” in people’s development. While Mbendjele are not interested in defining these “stages” with age or numbers, they are “functionally-defined”. Nonetheless, they are gradual and can be even overlapping, (similar to the description of !Kung by Draper in Ikels et al. 1992: 73). The ethnographic reality of these “stages” will be discussed in the chapter *On Mbendjele Life-Cycle*. The goal of this section is to portray general characteristics, underlying principles, and meanings of *ripening*, while taking this distinction of ripe/adult and unripe/child into account.

Lewis remarked that regardless of what language particular Yaka group speaks, they all

maintain intimate relation with the forest: *"like a person and their own body, expressed in the proverb, "A Yaka loves the forest as he loves his own body."* (2002: 54). My observations of people's conversations and remarks in relation to the forest led me to a conclusion that the forest is seen as abundant, peaceful, cool, and helps in conceiving children. Forest is the ideal place to share secrets, to make love, to give birth, to be in when seeking protection in times of conflicts. Mbendjele from Djoubé refer to themselves as:

bà-tò	***b-á***	***ndímá***
2-person	2-POSS	forest

'people of the forest'

bà-kóndʒà	***b-á***	***ndímá***
2-guardian	2-POSS	forest

'guardians of the forest'

While my informants used forest metaphors when talking about people, they utilized human-inspired metaphors when talking about the forest. Trees are born, grow, and die. Female trees give birth, and they keep birth-spacing as Mbendjele women do. Fruits are children, young trees are "child trees". Trees can communicate, take decisions for themselves, can help people in resolving conflicts, they can help animals or other trees and spirits as well. They can heal, or they can even kill. Trees have also their own heads, they have arms, and legs. Hints on similar views were shown in ethno-linguistic analysis of Baka's wild yam knowledge: *"Baka terms applied to yam morphology are drawn from terms referring to human anatomy."* (Dounias 2001: 141).

Basic Terminology of Ripening

Trees must be mature to give birth to their children – fruit. Not all trees give birth every year, and some trees never give birth. Everything takes its own time, and as Mbendjele like to say: *"It's like that, it's good like that."* (*à dìɛ́ bóná*). This also applies to children's ripening – not all fruits on a single tree are born and ripen at the same pace and in the same way. In order to get the desirable, tasty, juicy, and sweet children, trees have to let them grow in their own ways. However, it is also necessary to have the right conditions that promote their ripening. Among people, that is the responsibility of adults and elders – who are refered to as *màtínà* – the roots, sometimes also the trunk that gives the tree

strength and stability (also interpreted as "origins" in Duke 2001: 17). Without roots there would be no fruit and Mbendjele adults sometimes remind children of this.

Children are not fully-grown adults – they are ripening yet (*bò-tádè*). The remarks on their unripeness emerged when people puzzled about others' actions, when something went wrong, or when something ended up in an unexpected way. An adolescent girl *Èmílí* married my interpreter *Mbámù*. But their marriage "passed" after a few days. *Èmílí* did not build their separate hut and did not prepare food for *Mbámù*. Elder women agreed on that she "ripens" yet (*à tádè*), because she does not know that cooking is important in maintaining marriage.

On a different occasion, we were building a mud-and-thatch house in the village. We needed to get *gáɔ̀*[7] vines that are used for tying wood logs together in order to build the skeleton. *Kàkándʒì* told me that he is going to get some *gáɔ̀*. So I went with him. When we returned, his mother laughed:

À	***dìɛ́***	***mò-nà***	***gáɔ̀!***
3SG	be.PRS	1-child	5.type.of.vine

'It is a gáɔ child.'

À	***dìɛ́***	***nà***	***búdì***	***tró.***
3SG	be.PRS	with	9.hardness	too.much[FR:trop]

'It's too hard.'

À	***búkà***	***nà***	***bò-ká.***
3SG	break.PRS	with	14-quickness

'Breaks easily.'

À	***dìèŋgá***	***mè-lɛ́***	***támbí!***
3SG	hold.PRS	4-wood	NEG

'It would not hold the wood!'

Kàkándʒì	***à***	***dìɛ́***	***mò-nà –***	***à***	***tádè.***
Male.name	3SG	be.PRS	1-child	3SG	ripen.PRS

'Kàkándʒì is a child – he matures yet.'

[7] *Ancistrophyllum secundiflorum (P.BEAUV) WENDL*

À ***tí*** ***ébá!***
3SG NEG know.PRS
'He doesn't know!'

In his cross-cultural analysis of ethnographies of childhood and child development, Lancy (2014) found shared perceptions of "delayed personhood" in Non-Western, small-scale societies. One of these perceptions Lancy labelled as "not yet ripe" model, where: *"The denial of personhood is based on the patent deficiencies of the infant as a social being."* (2014: 79). While from an Mbendjele adult perspective, unripeness is also associated with such deficiencies, it does not infer the denial of personhood. These expressions are used only to refer to children as not yet understanding issues *the same ways* as adults do. While Mbendjele children are unripe adults, they are fully ripe children. Mbendjele children are seen as "persons", capable of their own decisions. Even unborn children (*b-éfɛ̀*) are capable of expressing their own desires. For example, it is not only mother's, but also child's decision when s/he is going to be born.

Similarly, some may argue that Mbendjele children's *ripening* view is equivalent to "Holding Pattern" perspective (Bock et al. 2008; Lancy 2012: 8), which posits children as 'still being made', 'adults-to-be', and lacking agency. While Mbendjele do see children through lens of ripening, they also value personal autonomy of children, which implies that children are capable of self-functioning, independence, and creativity in their lives.

However, in accordance with the "not ripe yet" model proposed by Lancy (2014: 78), Mbendjele also refer to infants with expressions of *softness* and *hardness*. But the vocabulary is used in contrast with the Lancy's model. Children, like fruit, are unripe when they are "hard" (*"búdì"*). From the Mbendjele standpoint, ripening is not a process when an infant turns into a human being, but when a child turns into adult, without denial of personhood.

To be ripe, one can be described as delicious (*mòɲɔ̀ŋgɔ̀*), sweet (*èlɛ́ngí*), not hard (*nà búdì té*), beautiful (*èɲìɛ̀*), full/filled up (*màlóndɛ́*), and intelligent (*màyɛ́lɛ́*). The metaphors of sweetness and deliciousness was also observed by Kisliuk (1991: 196, 210). Biaka employed an expression *"sukele"* from French *"sucre",* when remarking on one's ripeness in dancing performances. My Mbendjele informants employed the

expressions of sweetness and deliciousness across various domains, from commenting on the taste of food, to performances, or a good quality of accomplished tasks.

While in English language, there is a distinction between intelligence, wisdom, and knowledge, Mbendjele use one term to refer to all of these – *"màyɛ́lɛ́"*. The expression of *"màyɛ́lɛ́"* was used in the meaning of "tradition", too. For example, if there were Mbendjele visitors from distant places and they would have baskets weaved in a different way, Mbendjele from Djoubé would refer to it as *"mà-yɛ́lɛ́ kàkwí"* – "a different tradition".

In general, people do not *have* wisdom, they *are with* wisdom (*bò-dìɛ́ nà màyɛ́lɛ́*). The lack of the verb "to have" implies "transitiveness" of people's knowledge – knowledge is not something that can be "owned". Some people claimed that they have already acquired enough of knowledge (*kòká*), or that they are satisfied with it – the term is referred to as 'satiated' with food (*mbímbà*). Over the lifespan, people can be with certain knowledge, but can also occur that they are without it – they can lose it (*ndìmbìlà*) or forget it (*bòsàná*), or the wisdom can pass (*ɸánà*), it can also go (*dwá*). This also suggest that elders are not necessarily perceived as "repositories of knowledge" (such as the !Kung; Biesele & Howell 1981). Age is not a discriminant of people's wisdom in this egalitarian society.

Growing into

To refer to physical growing of a child, Mbendjele utilize a general verb for *growing* (*bò-ɸóŋgà*), or they like to say *going tall* (*dwá ó ɸàdíkò*). There is another expression – *growing <u>into</u>* (*bò- ɸóŋgà <u>nà</u>*), which is used to refer to social, cognitive, and physical development of children – inherent and inseparable elements of maturing. Mbendjele do not "become" wise – they "grow into wisdom" (*bò-ɸóŋgà nà màyɛ́lɛ́*). They do not "become" rude – they "grow into rudeness" (*bò-ɸóŋgà nà bò-tíya*). While "becoming" partially grasps the dynamics and potential lengthiness of processes that can eventually lead to wisdom (OED, n.d.)[8], it also posits abruptness or suddenness of wisdom acquisition. The term "growing" reflects more truthfully on the dynamics of these gradual processes.

[8] OED = Oxford English Dictionary

Sharing and Taking

Ripening and *growing into* are expressions that posit long-term acquisition of knowledge and skills. Mbendjele also employ single-event instances of *knowledge sharing* and *taking*, seeing teaching and learning as a *sharing* and *taking* process. "Someone who knows" shares (*kàbá* [BM], *kábwòlá* [DJ]) with "someone who doesn't know" – and the person that doesn't know, takes it (*bɔ̀sá*):

Tài	***w-ámù***	***à***	***kàbá-ká***	***mú***	***mà-yɛ́lɛ́***	***m-íké.***
1.father	1-1SG.POSS	3SG	share-PST	1SG	6-wisdom	6-a.lot

'My father shared a lot of wisdom with me.'

Àmɛ́	***námú***	***bòs-á***	***mà-yɛ́lɛ́***	***nà***	***bò-ká.***
1SG	1SG	take-PRS	6-wisdom	with	14-quickness

'Me, I take wisdom quickly.' ('I learn quickly')

In respect to "teaching", Lewis (2016: 149) indicates employment of Lingala term *"ko-sambela"*, which is used in reference to pray or advice. In my fieldsite, the Lingala term for teaching *yékwisa* (Redden & Bongo 1963: 289) or *kolakisa* (Etsio 2003: 208) were not used. Instead, the French and Lingala word of "school" (*école*) *lɛ̀kólì/yɛ̀kólì* were used in a similar way as the expression of *"mà-yɛ́lɛ́"*: in the meaning of knowledge, wisdom, school, or tradition – and as something that can be shared or taken:

Kàbá	***(à)mɛ́***	***yɛ̀kóli!***
share.IMP	1SG	school[FR:école]

'Share knowledge with me!'

À	***bɔ̀sá***	***yɛ̀kólì***	***nà***	***mà-nà.***
3SG	take.PRS	school[FR:école]	with	6-slowness

'S/he takes knowledge slowly.'

Aka also do not have a specific expression for "teaching", they employ the term of *"mateya"* to refer to "advice" or "guidance" which accords with the Pygmy value of personal autonomy, implying that the child has a choice to follow the advice or guidance, or to refuse it (Hewlett & Roulette 2016: 12).

Is "sharing knowledge" teaching? The English term "teaching" comprises meanings of "to show", "to present", "to offer", "to direct", "to instruct"; it can be used as a threat,

too but fails to tackle on the Mbendjele view of "*sharing*" (OED, n.d.). It also does not indicate that the recipient is active, where at least two people are involved – the one who shares and the one who takes. Importantly, this sharing and taking interaction is *not* limited to dyadic exchanges only. One person can share with many people, or the whole group, or the group of people can share with one, too. Sharing and taking also implies one's freedom to share and/or to take. It also points to the active engagement of both – the one who shares and the one who takes. The recipient here is not passive, as s/he actively "takes" if s/he wants to. If sharing and taking is teaching, then it must be such a one that involves active participation on both sides.

Another expression is *knowing (ébá),* which refers to knowledge or skill that have already been acquired, or it can be used in reference to the child who grasps the essence, the understanding of something. In my observation this "understanding" seems more important. "Knowing" here does not imply perfection in a skill, as many aspects of people's activities and skills are not defined by specific rules as how they should be done. For example, on one occasion I saw a recently weaned boy dancing. His dance was a clumsy one, in comparison with other children of his age. However, the adults remarked that *"he already knows"* (*"à mù ébá"*). From an Mbendjele view, dancing skill is not something that has to be "achieved", or something that has to be done in prescribed way. It is rather that dancing as such is good to do and this boy *already knows* about its goodness.

On Seeing, Doing, Entering, and Following

Some expressions are limited to specific contexts (see Table 8). For example, "to accompany" (*tómbà*) is employed when the teacher accompanies novice somewhere in order to share knowledge with him or her. For example, if a child wants to learn where to find certain type of yam, adult accompanies him or her to the forest with an intention to demonstrate.

Adults fully control sharing of certain knowledge with children. This applies to secret knowledge, highly specific and powerful knowledge of healing, or initiation to rituals, such as in two major forest spirit rituals Mbendjele have – male's *Èdʒéŋgì* and female's

Íŋgòkú[9]. The child might attempt to demand to be initiated, but eventually, it is adult, or a group of adults who decide, whether it is the right time: *"Elders observe small boys and comment to each other when they think someone is ready. They may even ask the boy if he thinks he is ready to 'enter'"* (Lewis 2002: 180). This type of knowledge sharing and taking is referred to by *"entering into"* (*bò-gwìá*) (*"mongwie"* in Lewis 2002: 148). This expression tackles on the ethnographic reality – being initiated into secret knowledge or powerful healing practices is like *entering into* a whole new world.

In his meta-analysis of immediate-return hunter-gatherer education characteristics, Peter Gray (2011: 30) suggests that adults: "*did not direct children's education or in other ways tell them what to do."* In an Mbendjele context, children are generally free to choose what they want to learn, but adults are very loud in encouraging them – *telling them what to.* "Encouragements to learn" in are examples of how would adults draw attention of the children in order to promote learning in them. They are related to actual doing, hearing or listening, touching, seeing, following, and even staring – expressions promoting active, "body and mind" participation in desirable activities. For example: *Do! Look! Follow! Touch!* Similar expressions are employed by Chabu forager-farmers of Ethiopia – "watching", "listening", "doing", and "participating", as mentioned in Hewlett & Roulette (2016: 11). In scholarly terms, these words could be interpreted as verbal instructions.

[9] *Íŋgòkú* is equivalent to Lewis's *Ngoku* (2002), and Kisliuk's *Dingboku* (1998).

Table 8 Mbendjele terminology of social learning processes

Scholarly Terms	**Mbendjele Equivalent**	**English Translation**	**Domains of knowledge/skill and other comments***
Observation	*tá / tálà* *bándá nà mísɔ̀* *Ɔ́kà* *bándá nà màlùí* *sàŋgàɲà*	to look to follow with eyes to listen to follow with ears to stare	Employed when talking about the acquisition of skills e.g. learning to hunt, to gather, to fish.
Participation	*mpìá*	to participate to engage in to take on the role of	Engagements in communal activities – mostly *màssánà* (as a singer, dancer, drummer, or e.g. performer of a forest spirit); in *mòsámbò* as a speaker; in *mòádʒò* as an actor.
Learning by doing	*gìá/ kìá*	to do/make	
Repetition	*gìá/ kìá bà-mbàlà bíké*	to do many times	Or the word is repeated *"I did, did, did, did, did…"*
Demonstration	*tómbà* *ɸèdìà*	to accompany to show	To accompany – related to the knowledge of forest, e.g. fauna and flora, way-finding information To show – technical skills; craft skills, e.g. tool use in food processing, making a skirt, dancing skills, caretaking skills
Verbal explanation	*sápwòlá*	to explain	Explaining social life, functions of social institutions, e.g. explaining differences between humans and animals.
Positive feedback	*kàná mòɲɔ̀ŋgɔ̀*	"to put/insert deliciousness", to lavish, to praise	If engaging in culturally desirable activities – mainly in the context of *màssánà.*
Negative feedback	*kàná múɲòá* *ɸɔ́ɸá nà búdì* *mɔ̀tá* *ɸɔ́ɸá nà kíngó àbòlé* *mpìá mòádʒò*	to mouth to talk harshly/strongly to laugh at to shout at to mock through mòádʒò	If engaging in culturally undesirable activities, breaching social norms and values; putting someone in danger.
Commands	*Referred to descriptively. Any of the expressions above in an imperative. People refered talked narratives about how they tell others to do this in context of learning* "		

*If I did not identify a specific domain of knowledge/skill to particular style, the field is left blank.

While Gray's analysis of hunter-gatherer education can be fruitful as an inspiration for revitalising Western formal schooling systems (2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2016), it over-simplifies diversities of educational practices in egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies. The author mostly relies on the selected excerpts of general hunter-gatherer ethnographies, where "education" was not their primary research concern, or uses examples from societies that could *not* be strictly defined as immediate-return.

This section explored the meanings and contexts of terminology that is used when talking about the issues of ripening, teaching and learning. The following delves into the principles that guide ripening processes.

People Ripen in Their Own Ways

As one cannot force trees to give birth to already ripened fruits, one cannot force children to know everything before it is their time. Several months into my fieldwork, I asked *Mbúmà*'s daughter *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* to show me how to weave basket using *mò-nɗàndà* vines (*Cercestis congoensis ENGL.*). I asked her so many times that *Nìèlèkέ,* older sister of *Mbúmà,* scolded me:

Díká	***mò-nà!***	***Díká***	***sàkídìέ***	***yέ!***	***À***	***tádè!***
let.IMP	1-child	stop.IMP	bother.PRS	3SG	3SG	ripen.PRS

'Let the child be! Stop bothering her! She ripens yet!'

Nìèlèkέ made it clear: I should not force *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* into learning against her will. Fruit, like children, grow in their own way and at their own pace. *Mbúmà* explained it to me once:

À	***dìέ***	***mò-nà***	***nà***	***mò-nà***	***à***	***gàdìέ.***
3SG	be.PRS	1-child	and	1-child	>	another

'There are different sorts of children.'

Bέnέ	***bà***	***dìέ***	***ndέŋgέ***	***mɔ̀tí***	***té.***
3PL	3PL	be.PRS	5.way	one	NEG

'They are not all the same way.'

Bέnέ	***bà***	***dìέ***	***kàkwí.***
3PL	3PL	be.PRS	different

'They are different.'

Mò-nà mɔ̀tí à ɸóŋgà w-àbòlé, à ɸóŋgà bòkà-bòkà.
1-child one 3SG grow.PRS 1-big 3SG grow.PRS RED-quickly
'One child grows big, grows quickly.'

Mò-nà à gàdìɛ́ à ɸóŋgà nà mà-nà, à dìɛ́ mò-sɔ́nì.
1-child > another 3SG grow.PRS with 6-slowness 3SG be.PRS 1-small
'The other child grows slowly, is small.'

À dìɛ́ bóná.
3SG be.PRS like.that
'It is like that.'

Mò-nà mɔ̀tí nà mò-nà à gàdìɛ́,
1-child one with 1-child > another
'Each child to its own,'

bɛ́nɛ́ bà-sànà nà bò-lòngá.
3PL 3PL-play.PRS with 14-being.together
'they play together.'

Mɛ́ mò-nà w-ábòlé à-bɔ̀s-á mà-yɛ́lɛ́
but[FR:mais] 1-child 1-big 3SG-take-PRS 6-wisdom

bòkà-bòkà, mò-nà à gàdìɛ́ à-ɸóŋg-à nà
quickly 1-child > another 3SG-grow-PRS into

mà-yɛ́lɛ́ nà mà-nà, nà mà-nà.
6-wisdom with 6-slowness with 6-slowness
'But the bigger child takes wisdom quickly, the other child grows into wisdom slowly, slowly.'

À dìɛ́ bóná.
3SG be.PRS like.that
'It is like that.'

Díká mò-nà ɸóŋg-ɛ̀dí nà ndɛ́ŋgɛ́ àŋgwí.
let-IMP 1-child grow-GER in 5.way 3SG.POSS
'Let the child grow in her/his way.'

Nà ndɛ́ŋgɛ́ àŋgwí bó à-dìɛ́ tò ndɛ́ŋgɛ́ àŋgwí.
in 5.way 3SG.POSS because 3SG-be.PRS just 5.way 3SG.POSS
'In her/his way, because it is just her/his way.'

Bá-nà tú bà-dìɛ́ nà è-ssɛ́ŋgò nà búsɛ́:
2-child all[FR:tout] 2-be.PRS with 7-joy to 1PL

bá-nà	***bà-sɔ́nì***	***nà***	***bá-nà***	***b-ábòlé.***
2-child	2-small	and	2-child	2-big

'All children bring joy to us: the small children as well as the big children.'

Mbúmà highlighted the importance of being non-judgemental. Children are not judged by specific standards; they are not expected to grow in some prescribed desirable ways. Learning is to try your best and that is good enough. This applies to everyone, not children only. Even if one is not strong, or brave, s/he is still valuable and important to the community. So disabled people, mentally challenged etc., are all loved and appreciated, even if they can rarely achieve the production or contribution of others.

By letting fruits and children ripen in their own ways, Mbendjele also refer to one of their key cultural values – respect for personal autonomy – a widely shared concept in (semi)nomadic hunter-gatherer groups (Gardner 1991; Lee & Daly 2004: 406–407). In practice, respect for personal autonomy means that no one can coerce others, and as *Mbúmà* has shown, this applies to children and their growing and learning "speed" as well.

Gallois (2015: 106–107) suggested that the onset of personal autonomy of Baka children starts after the period of weaning. By attempting to frame the "onset of autonomy" in Mbendjele children into the stage-like categories such as "weaning", I would fail to grasp the diversity that Mbendjele value in the way children grow, and *gradual* nature of "growing", reflected in an Mbendjele everyday language. "Onset" of autonomy implies that all children grow in standard ways, that autonomy in children is "switched on" abruptly and similarly in all children. Where a society is not concerned with producing a particular "type" of desirable child, as for instance is implicit in formal schooling, this openness to diversity and active respect for it is what is characteristic of the ways that Mbendjele rear their children.

Personal autonomy can mean something different in different hunter-gatherer groups and localities. In the case of extreme personal autonomy, we could assume that parents would let their children be and let them do or do not everything they want to. For example, amongst Aka Pygmies from CAR Lobaye District (Christophe Boesch 2015, personal communication), and above Berandjoko village in Congo-Brazzaville (Jerome Lewis 2017 personal communication), parents did not treat children's feet infections

caused by chiggers. In Djoubé, parents went so far as to tie up children to remove their chiggers, against their will.

Personal autonomy can be manifested in various ways. Scholars drew attention to the juvenile's freedom in playing with dangerous objects (Hewlett 1991a, 2014: 247; David F. Lancy 2016b: 655–656), possibility to refuse authoritarian demands on children (Hewlett 1991a: 35; Lewis 2002), or lack of task assignment (Boyette 2013).

Personal autonomy is an important element that shapes the nature of children's ripening. For example, it is manifested in freedom of association, Mbendjele children can play and stay with who they like (see also Lewis 2008) and are not pushed to *grow into* those particular skills or knowledge unless they are interested in them. This also means that it is acceptable if they lose interest in something that they were *growing into,* or even not growing into anything specific. Parents and other adults avoid harassing children to act if they do not do anything.[10]

Eventually, being bored motivates children in decisions about the domain for their individual ripening: *"boredom is akin to free-floating attention. In the muffled, sometimes irritable confusion of boredom the child is reaching to a recurrent sense of emptiness out of which his real desire can crystallize."* (Phillips 1993: 69).

Guardians of Specialisations

In the central African hunter-gatherer literature, scholars usually refer to three main specialist positions to which people refer to with their specific names: *kòmbɛ́tì*– the elder or a man whose responsibility is to communicate with Bilo and other outsiders, *túmà* – the great elephant hunter, and *ŋgàŋgà*, the healer (Hewlett 1991a: 40). Some authors mentioned several other specialisations – Lewis referred to a specialist in public speaking (*lipwete*), a spirit guardian (*konja mokondi*), and a song composer (*kombo*) (2002: 78, 2014a: 233). Kisliuk remarked, that BiAka recognise also singing specialists (*ginda*) (2016: 4).

[10] Boyette observed that Aka children (from 4-16 years old), spend 28 % of their days by "doing nothing"/lying around (Boyette 2013 in Hewlett 2014: 252).

Nonetheless, there are diverse ways of specialisation even *within* these statuses. For example, there are different "types" of *ŋgàŋgà* healers. In Djoubé, I met a healer who was specialised in couples' relationships, polygamous relationships and healing babies, a healer of conditions arising from sorcery or from people telling lies, a specialist in healing through bloodletting and skin incisions, a healer of jealousy, as well as specialists who knew how to get rid of "Satan", and I met one person who specialised in communication and negotiation with specific owl species that bring messages of an upcoming death in the group (I will return to this issue within the chapter of *màssánà*.

While these specialisations are referred to with their proper terms, they exclude the spheres of children's specialisations who are too young to be healers or great elephant hunters yet. Children's specialisations are referred to descriptively by saying that someone is *"with intelligence in something"* (*"bò-dìé nà màyélé nà"*). For example, a specialist in removing chiggers is called *màyélé nà tùbédì màkándʒà.* In my fieldsite, *Dʒánì* was a specialist in hair lice removal, *Kwónà* was the child forest food way-finder; *Ànísè* was appreciated as an extremely original dancer; *Mbóngó* was skilful in cracking oil palm nuts and asked to help when women needed to make kernel palm oil, and *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* was a hair-braiding specialist.

Children's specialisations are driven by their self-motivation. Adults not only respect individual autonomy of children, they actively promote them to value and cultivate their individuality and uniqueness. This is visible in the diversity of children's specialisations as described above, as well as in their individual expression in music and dance performances, make-up, or hair-braiding style. It is particularly visible in musical expressions in polyphonic singing where people *must* sing differently, otherwise the polyphony would dissolve (Lewis 2002).

This also implies that Mbendjele egalitarianism is not associated with "sameness", as in the Western hegemonic sense of "equality", which dictates: *"being equal in quantity, amount, value, intensity, etc."* (OED, n.d.). Contrary – diversity and individual uniqueness is celebrated, and this un-sameness (*kàkwí*) of individuals is valued equally. It also applies to groups – for example, gender groups. Building on Lewis (2002), Finnegan (2017) claimed that each gender is seen as inherently different, but their un-sameness is cultivated, celebrated, and valued equally. People's un-sameness, whether on an individual or group level, is expected, respected, cultivated, and celebrated.

Why this sort of diversity does not lead to hierarchy or asymmetric distribution of food? The expressions that are employed to refer to people's specialised knowledge – regardless of the nature of the specialisation –are seen as *"things to be looked after"*:

è-kóndʒà	***y-ámù***
7-thing.to.look.after	7-1SG.POSS

'my thing to look after'

At the beginning of this chapter, I have mentioned that my Mbendjele informants referred to themselves as "guardians of the forest" (*bà-kóndʒà b-á ndímá*) (see also the work of Lewis 2002, and Köhler & Lewis 2002 on more on this issue). While *"kóndʒà"* refers to "guardian" – a person that guards/looks after something, *"è-kóndʒà"* refers to a "thing" that is guarded or looked after. For example, an elderly *Pòlákɔ́* was renown for her love for *bòkánà* (*Panda*) nuts. She knew where to find these nut trees. She knew which trees "gave birth" that particular year, or indicated that certain trees, in more distant places, could have given birth since they were "keeping birth spacing" for several years. She also knew specific culinary tricks and recipes with the ingredient of *bòkánà*. If I asked *Mbúmà* to take me to some more of these trees, she would say:

Tùn-á	***Pòlákɔ́,***	***bò-kánà***	***à***	***dìɛ́***	***è-kóndʒà***	***àŋgwí!***
ask-IMP	female.name	14-type.of.nut	3SG	be.PRS	7- thing.to.look.after	3SG.POSS

'Ask Pòlákɔ́, bòkánà is her thing to look after!'

Despite this individuality in specialisation, the expressions refer to its benefits for the group – they are seen as one's "responsibilities" to be guarded and looked after, they are not implying "power", "prestige", or "authority". By seeing people's specialisations as "things they look after" gives an impression as if people could not "own" them. Even so, as I have mentioned above, people's knowledge can be somewhat "transitive", it can come and it can go. Eventually, it's beneficial for everyone to value diversity and let people to specialise themselves in what they have a passion for. People's specialisations are for the good of everyone.

On Deliciousness and Beauty, Noises, Emptiness and Rotting

Engaging in culturally ideal activities is *delicious* (*mò-ɲɔ̀ŋgɔ̀*), *beautiful* (*èɲìɛ̀*), and brings *direct joy* (*èsséngò dìrékt*). *Màssánà*, in simplest way explained as play and ritual is the most ideal activity a person can engage in. *Màssánà* opens the camp for food,

heals people, and creates abundance of wellbeing and happiness in the world (*mò-kílí*). If children take (*mpià*) *màssánà*, no matter the quality of their performance, they are *"lavishly praised"* (Lewis 2016: 150) – their acts are beautiful, delicious, and bring direct joy. *Màssánà* is an ideal venue for children's ripening: *"Doing màssánà (verb, bo.sane) results in specific areas of cultural learning: notably in key life skills, cosmology, folk biology, and religious practice."* (Lewis 2016: 149).

On the contrary, *noise* and *disorder* (see Table 9) lead to *emptiness/rotting* (*pólà/àpɔ̀lánɛ́*[11]). Mbendjele are *"hyper-sensitive to the sounds around them."* (Lewis 2009: 232). Vigilance to *noises* is especially important, since they carry warning messages and require action. Contrary to the sounds of *màssánà,* noise kills the forest – it scares away the hunt, brings hunger, and illnesses: *"the noisy camp is a hungry camp"* (noise "akami", quietness "ekimi" in Turnbull 1961: 120). If not ceased, disorder can even lead to empty/rotten *màssánà* (Lewis 2002: 164), or a dry *màssánà* (*nà mànɛ̀*). Noise is unpleasant, hot, and painful (*è-tùkùmà*) per se. However, it can also be attributed to certain types of physical and social spaces, such as the open environment of village (Lewis 2002: 89), or ethnic groups – Bilo (Leonhardt 1999: 187, 260; Lewis 2002: 215, 249). Children can be producers of noise and disorder, too (see Table 10). No matter the cause or source of noisiness and disorder, they bring unfortunateness to people and to the world they live in, and so they need to be avoided or ceased.

Table 9 Expressions for noise and disorder

dèzódr	disorder[FR:désordre]
àmbúlìé	disorder[FR:embrouiller]
mà-kɛ́lélɛ́	6-noise[LG:makélélé]
mò-búlú	3-disorder[LG:mobúlú]
mò-tɔ́kɔ́	3-noise

[11] It refers both to "rotting" and "emptiness" at the same time (Combettes & Tomassone 1978: 65).

Table 10 Children as noise and disorder producers – some of the symptoms of emptiness

Expression				Description
bò-dìɛ́	***nà***	***mú-ɲòà***		showing off
14-be	with	3-mouth		talking too much
'being with mouth'				talking-not-doing
bò-dìɛ́	***nà***	***bándí***		to be dandy
14-be	with	5.dandyism		showing off
'being dandy'				
bò-ɸándì	***mò-ndɔ́***			make known
14-divulge	3-secret			private or sensitive
'divulging a secret'				information
bò-kílà	***kùmisà***	***bà-tò***		disrespectfulness
14-refuse	respect.PRS	2-person		
'refusing to respect people'				
bò-ɸɔ́ɸá	***mò-ndɔ́***	***wà***	***bwàɲìà***	telling lies
14-talk	3-iissus	POSS	9.lie	
'telling lies'				
bò-lèlá	***nà***	***pámbá***		children's attempts for
14-cry	with	9.rubish		manipulations of adults
'crying for no reason'				by fuzzy crying

Thus, children can cause their emptiness and rotting. However, others can also contribute to it.

Sharing Too Much Wisdom Also Leads to Emptiness

While children can contribute to their own emptiness or rotting, adults can contribute to it, too. For example, by sharing too much wisdom with them. The following is *Mbúmà's* speech on what happens if this does occur:

Àtónsìón!
warning[FR:attention]
'Warning!'

Ìl fɔ́ kábwòl-á nà mà-nà,

> it.is.necessary[FR:il.faut] share-PRS with 6-slowness

Bò mò-nà à tí ɸóŋgà nà bò-tíyà.
so.that 1-child 3SG NEG grow.PRS into 14-rudeness
'It is necessary to share slowly, so that the child doesn't grow into rudeness.'

Bòyí ò-kàb-é íké íké tró, à-dìɛ́ mò-ndɔ́.
If 2SG-share-PRS a.lot a.lot too.much[FR:trop] 3SG-be.PRS 3-problem
'If you share too much, it is a problem.'

Mò-nà à-ɸóŋg-à à-bɔ́lè, à-fóng-à bó
1-child 3SG-grow.up-PRS 1-big 3SG-grow.up-PRS that

yɛ́kòlà à-kíl-à kùmís-à bà-tò.
like[LG:lokóla] 3SG-refuse-PRS respect-PRS 2-person
'The child grows big, grows into – like – refuses respecting people.'

À-támbòl-á yɛ́kòlà è-bɔ̀bɔ̀ – yɛ́kòlà M-íló.
3SG-walk-PRS like[LG:lokóla] 7-gorilla like[LG:lokóla] 1-non.Pygmy.African
'Walks like a gorilla – like a Milo.'

Díká mò-nà!
let.IMP 1-child
'Let the child be!'

Yɛ́kòl-á! Mɛ́! Nà mà-nà, nà mànà nà mànà.
teach-IMP but[FR:mais] with 6-slowness with 6-slowness with 6-slowness
'Teach! But! Slowly, slowly, slowly.'

Mò-nà à-ndìngá m-íké m-íké m-íké mà-yɛ́lɛ́ – à-dìɛ́ bìɛ́n.
1-child 3SG-want.PRS 6-a.lot 6-a.lot 6-a.lot 6-wisdom 3SG-be.PRS good[FR:bien]
'The child wants a lot, a lot, a lot of wisdom – It is good.'

Mɛ́, sòkì ò-kàb-á m-íké, m-íké m-íké, mà-yɛ́lɛ́
but[FR:mais] if[LG:soki] 2SG-share-PRS 6-a.lot 6-a.lot 6-a.lot 6-wisdom

mò-nà à dìɛ́ nà bò-tíyà, à dìɛ́ nà
1-child 3SG be.PRS with 14-rudeness 3SG be.PRS with

má-sɔ̀ mà-bè, à dìɛ́ nà mò-súkú búdì,
6-smell 6-bad 3SG be.PRS with 3-head 9.hardness

à dìɛ́ nà màlàdí.
3SG be.PRS with disease[FR:maladie]
'But, if you share a lot, a lot, a lot of wisdom, the child is rude, smells bad, is stubborn, is ill.'

She continues by pretending to be the mother of this child, seeing her/him suffering after receiving too much of knowledge:

Mò-súkú	***à-bèlá,***	***mò-súkú***	***à-bèlá,***
3-head	3SG-hurt.PRS	3-head	3SG-hurt.PRS

'The head hurts, head hurts!'

Yáá͡á	***Yáá͡á***	***Yéé͡é***
sensation.of.sorrow	sensation.of.sorrow	sensation.of.sorrow

mò-nà	***àŋgámù***	***éé͡é!***
1-child	1SG.POSS	?

(lamenting) 'Oh, my child!'

Mò-nà	***àŋgámù***	***à-múwà-ló!***
1-child	1SG.POSS	3SG-die-PRS

'My child is dying!'

(À)mɛ́	***tí***	***ndìngá***	***bóná***	***té.***
1SG	NEG	want.PRS	like.that	NEG

'I don't want it like that!'

Díká	***kábwòl-á***	***nà***	***kílíkílí!***
stop.IMP	share-PRS	with	all.over.the.place

'Stop sharing all over the place.'

Díká!	***Díká!***	***Díká!***	***Díká!***	***Díká!***
stop.IMP	stop.IMP	stop.IMP	stop.IMP	stop.IMP

'Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop!'

Mbúmà explained that in cases of excessive sharing of knowledge, child doesn't only become rude and stop respecting others, but it can also negatively affect physical well-being of the child. She further elaborates on what are the implications of child's behaviour when being sick:

Mò-nà –	***mò-nà***	***à***	***lèlá***	***à***	***lèlá***	***à***	***lèlá.***
1-child	1-child	3SG	cry.PRS	3SG	cry.PRS	3SG	cry.PRS

'The child – the child cries, cries, cries:'

As if she were that crying child:

"Mò-súkú	***à-bèlá***	***námú***	***áá͡á!"***

3-head 3SG-hurt.PRS 1SG sensation.of.pain
'Oh, my head hurts!'

Now she returns back to her voice:

Yέ ***té*** ***bóná*** ***té!***
3SG NEG like.that NEG
'It is not good like that!'

Àmέ ***tí*** ***ndìngá*** ***bòná*** ***té.***
1SG NEG NEG want.PRS like.that NEG
'I don't want it like that!'

Mà-kέlélέ, ***mà-kέlélέ,*** ***mà-kέlélé!***
6-noise[LG: makélélé] 6-noise[LG:makélélé] 6-noise[LG:makélélé]
'Noise, noise, noise!'

Díká ***lèlá*** ***Díká*** ***lèlá!***
stop.IMP cry-GER stop.IMP cry-GER
'Stop crying! Stop crying!'

Bà-tò ***bà-dìέ*** ***nà*** ***dʒàlà!***
2-person 3PL-be.PRS with 5.hunger
'People are hungry!'

Díká ***lèlá*** ***bó*** ***bà-tò*** ***bà-dìέ*** ***nà*** ***dʒàlà***
stop.IMP cry-GER because 2-person 3PL-be.PRS with 5.hunger

téé͡éé.
sensation.of.duration
'Stop crying because people are very hungry.'

Ndímá ***à*** ***dìέ*** ***nà*** ***búdì!***
9.forest 3SG be.PRS with 9.hardness
'The forest is scarce on food!'

Bà-ítò ***bà-kéŋgòlá*** ***mè-lá*** – ***mè-lá*** ***m-été!***
2-woman 3PL-search.PRS 4-watery.yam 4-watery.yam 4-is.not
'Women look for watery yams – there are no watery yams!'

Dʒàlà, ***dʒàlà*** ***tró!***
5.hunger 5.hunger too.much[FR:trop]
'Hunger, too much hunger!'

Bà-ítò ***bà-kéŋgòlá*** ***b-èsùmá*** – ***b-èsùmá*** ***b-été!***
2-woman 3PL-search.PRS 8-type.of.yam 8-type.of.yam 8-is.not
'Women look for èsùmá yams – there are no èsùmá yams!'

Bà-tò ***bà-dìɛ́*** ***nà*** ***dʒàlà!***
2-person 3PL-be.PRS with 5.hunger
'People are hungry!'

Bà-tò ***bà-dìɛ́*** ***nà*** ***màlàdí!***
2-person 3PL-be.PRS with disease[FR:maladie]
'People are sick!'

Díká ***lèlá,*** ***mò-nà!***
stop.IMP cry.PRS 1-child
'Stop crying, child!'

Bà-tò ***gìá*** ***bó,*** ***gìá*** ***bó!***
2-person do.PRS DEM.PROX do.PRS DEM.DIST
'People do this, do that!'

Bà-kàn-á ***bwàŋgà*** ***bà-kàn-á*** ***bwàŋgà*** ***bà-kàn-á*** ***bwàŋgà.***
3PL-put-PRS 5.medicine 3PL-put-PRS 5.medicine 3PL-put-PRS 5.medicine
'They apply medicine, apply medicine, apply medicine.'

Kábwòl-ɛ̀dí ***mà-yɛ́lɛ́*** ***tró*** – ***yɛ́*** ***té*** ***bìɛ́n*** ***té!***
share-GER 6-wisdom too.much[FR:trop] 3SG NEG good[FR:bien] NEG
'Sharing too much wisdom – it is not good!'

Lancy (2016b: 39) predicted that in small-scale societies teaching is often proscribed or even deemed harmful. As *Mbúmà* explained, in an Mbendjele society, sharing knowledge is not proscribed, but can be harmful if done inappropriately. Sharing knowledge must respect child's individual development – it must be individually-tailored –and mustn't violate personal autonomy and egalitarian relations of those involved.

Mbúmà highlighted that sharing too much knowledge causes children to be dandy, show-off and it makes them more like Bilo. Sharing too much knowledge further causes illnesses in children. If children are sick, they cry a lot. Production of such noises impact everyone else – forest is displeased and cuts people away from food. As observed by Bahuchet (1985) among the Aka, people's welfare and happiness can be

easily threatened by actions, which are not happening at the right time. *Mbúmà* speech also shows that the right amount and pace of sharing knowledge is also important.

"There Are No Bad Children" even if They Grow into Rudeness

Building on Nietzsche, Chris Jenks (1996) outlined two major worldviews on children across cultures – "Apollonian" and "Dionysian". While the Apollonian child is seen as born innocent, and innately good, Dionysian child is wilful and sensual. According to the author, these views are reflected on in child-care practices. While the Apollonian child recurs in societies with democratic and liberal social order, Dionysian child in authoritarian hierarchical societies where these children must be "tamed" and dominated to secure their goodness. While Christianism (Dionysian style) highlights the recurrence of being born with "sin", that can be got rid off by external means, e.g. baptism and requested child's total obedience, with growing emphasis on psychological development, maternal role, attachment, and seeing children as "future investments" the Apollonian style.

Jenks theory is based on observations of Western historical developments, which are unfit to concern hunter-gatherers in Central Africa. However, the underlying idea of framing views on children in terms of their "goodness" and "badness" can be fruitful in terms of understanding and analysing child care practices.

Similar dichotomy is strongly present in ethnographies of Pygmy versus Bilo, or hunter-gatherer versus farmer parenting styles, where farmers require child's obedience, their care-taking is less indulgent to promote independence, they employ punishment, value gender and age hierarchy, request deference for respecting older/elders. Bilo parents request full obedience and respect from their children, and commonly employ physical punishment in cases of dis-obedience (Ember & Ember 2005; Fouts et al. 2005; Fouts & Lamb 2009: 394; B. L. Hewlett 2012; Hewlett 1991a: 46, 2014).

While Jens's explains this dichotomy through looking at the perception of children, the discussion on parenting styles in hunter-gatherer and farmer contexts roots in the distinction of different economies, and subsistence strategies:

> "Pressure toward obedience and responsibility should tend to make children

> into the obedient and responsible adults who can best ensure the continuing welfare of a society with a high-accumulation economy, whose food supply must be protected and developed gradually throughout the year. Pressure toward self-reliance and achievement should shape children into the venturesome, independent adults who can take initiative in wresting food daily from nature, and thus ensure survival in societies with a low-accumulation economy." (Barry et al. 1959: 62–63).

Smith (2012) suggests that there is not only Apollonian and Dionysian child, she proposes also "Athenian child" that poses children as capable of self-regulation. Their: *"capacities that will self-manifest fully fledged when a child is ready and that can, in fact, be damaged if forced or encouraged prior to that time."* (Sobo 2015: 49). Mbendjele child reminds the "Athenian child". The Mbendjele child is innately good and innocent, but not passive – self-maximizing, capable his/her own decisions, independent. Mbendjele worldview on children posits their inherent goodness– even those who "take on a wrong path" or grow into rudeness (see also Figure 8).

***

In this chapter I have described the nature of discourse that concerns child's development, and the concept of teaching and learning. Mbendjele do not have a vision of a "desirable type of a child". All children bring joy, and all are inherently good, even if they make mistakes. The role of the adults is to respect their uniqueness (respect their personal autonomy), but also to remind them if what they do is wrong or dangerous to prevent their emptiness and rotting.

I have hinted on that children are perceived as inherently innocent and good. One of the goals of the chapter that follows is to explain *why* children are innocent and need to be lavished, indulged, and cared for with love and affection.

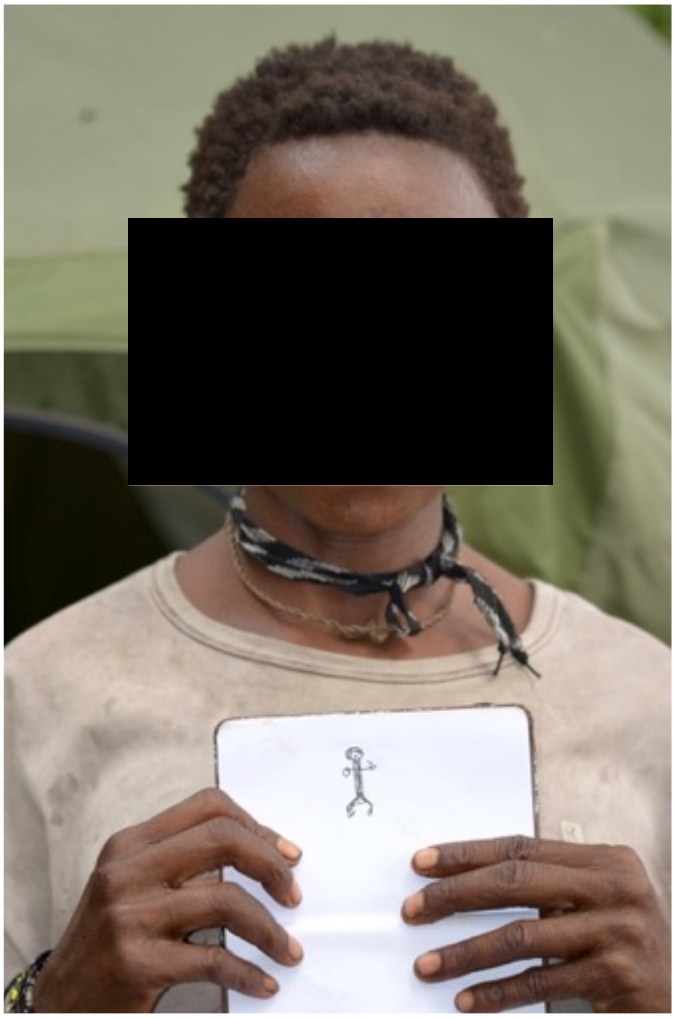

Figure 8 “Bad children don't exist!”

My informants were very interested in what I was “marking” in my notebooks (*kómà mò-kándà̀*) and expressed desire to mark their observations, too. Everyone joined this unusual *màssánà* and we exploited a lot of topics to mark about. One morning *Àndʒélé* asked me what should she mark on the paper that day and I asked her to draw a “bad child”. When she returned with her drawing, I asked: *“What is bad about this child?”* She laughed*: “Nothing. Bad children don't exist!*

5 ON MBENDJELE LIFE-CYCLE

As well as adult women and men, the cosmology of *èkìlá* is interwoven into children's lives, even without their full acknowledgement. Though mostly implicitly, *èkìlá* largely influences Mbendjele lives. This chapter is to describe Mbendjele life-cycle within the context of Mbendjele *èkìlá* believes. I will also use this opportunity to discuss some other characteristics of each "life-stage", as I will repeatedly return to these issues throughout this thesis.

Èkìlá, èkóndʒì, màténà

In practice, the word of *"èkìlá"* is uttered rarely. And if so, it is employed in two general contexts: to warn people about doing or avoiding doing something, because, eventually, it will cause *èkìlá;* and to interpret unfortunate, unhappy, and bad events – someone did something wrong and it caused *èkìlá.* My aim is to focus on that side of *èkìlá,* which is linked to childhood and child development – *èkóndʒì.* I will show that the concept of *èkóndʒì* is an "invisible" force promoting childrearing practices, which seem to be shared in contemporary nomadic hunter-gatherer groups (Hewlett 2014; Hewlett & Lambeds 2005; Konner 2010, 2016).

Building on the claim of Lewis (2008: 297) that *èkìlá* and corresponding practices under different names are shared by linguistically diverse Pygmy groups, I explored ethnographies of Pygmy hunter gatherers and their beliefs. Table 11 summarises information on *èkóndʒì*-like beliefs in Mbendjele, Aka, Aka/Bofi, Bakoya, Baka, Efe, Mbuti, and Twa groups. The authors of these publications were addressing different questions, e.g. causes of death, folk etiology, or food proscriptions and prescriptions. Thus, it is likely that information provided about *èkóndʒì*-like beliefs was in-exhaustive. Nonetheless, all Pygmy groups seem to share the following:

- Whether intentional or not, parents' actions (both the mother's and the father's) are believed to *directly* influence health and life of their children.

- These actions involve mainly: violations of food taboos and misconducts in marital/spousal relationships.

- Infants/Children are helpless – their illnesses and health conditions are *not* their fault; they are caused by parents' improper actions solely.

Even though the Table 11 illustrates these believes in detail, I will give one example: There is a couple and they have a child, which is still being breastfed. However, the mother recently realised that she is pregnant and carried on breastfeeding. She also ate meat from a monkey hunted by her husband. There are several misconducts here: post-partum sex is taboo; breastfeeding one's older child when one is pregnant is taboo; eating monkey meat during a pregnancy is taboo (and even worse if it has been hunted by the husband). These are examples of behaviours that cause *èkóndʒì* – the lives of the mother, unborn child and the breastfed child are under threat. Such behaviours also cause *màténà* – the husband's hunting success is ruined.

Both parents are held accountable – their behaviours were improper and put their well-being and the lives of their children under threat. They have to seek a cure. This example also shows that success in hunting and success in childbearing/rearing are weaved together and and it is dangerous to mix these substances.

Women seek help from female healers in cases of child and childbirth-related issues (*èkóndʒì*), and men seek for help from men healers in cases of ruined hunting success (*màténà*). For other health issues, women often ask help of male healers, who arrange public ceremonial healing ritual *bòŋgáŋgá*[12]. *Èkóndʒì* specialists tend to be also skilled in delivering babies, love magic, treatments of female physical health and illnesses in children, couple's therapies, and also therapies for those in polygamous relationships. An *èkóndʒì* healer can also indirectly treat a man's ruined hunting success (*màténà*). This, however, often happens without the man's knowledge. Typically, it involves adding special herbs into cooked meals. I have heard that men also can treat women's *èkóndʒì* issues, but again without women's knowledge. Nevertheless, I did not have direct access to verify this since men did not share with me these sorts of information.

[12] The term *ŋgàŋgà* is widely used in Congo-Brazzaville to refer to healers or magicians in general (Mfoutou 2010: 125).

Table 11 *Èkóndʒì*-like believes in Central African hunter-gatherers

Mbendjele

Name	Causes	Symptoms in Children	Some Details	References
Ekondi	Excessive sexuality	Weakness; Illness	"If you mix your *ekila* around with lots of people then, if you're a man, your hunting is ruined (*matena*). A woman has problems in childbirth (*ekondi*), and her infants get weak and ill." (Lewis 2008: 298; italics in original).	Lewis (2008).

Aka/Bofi

Ekundi	Mother slept with other man while pregnant.	Death	"[…] (I) ekundi, in which a child or mother dies because the mother committed adultery while she was pregnant; (2) gbe, in which a child dies because a parent ate a taboo rat (Cricetomys emini); (3) dikundi or balimba, witchcraft; (4) himbi, in which a child dies because his or her mother had intercourse before the child could walk well; (5) zele gora, in which a woman dies because she marries while still in mourning for her previous husband […]." (Hewlett et al. 1986: 53).	Hewlett et al (1986).
Dikundi; Balimba	Sexual intercourse before the child walks well	Death		
Ekila Kema	Violations of food taboo (taboo monkey)	Convulsions; Stiffness; Rigid face; Fever		
N/A	Denying: holding the infant; breastfeeding; responding to crying	Sickness; Death	"[…] denying a child the breast will lead to the child contracting a deadly illness. […] foragers felt that if they did not respond to a crying infant that she would get sick […] the Aka said their infants would get sick if they were not held." (Hewlett 2016: S35).	Hewlett (2016).

Aka

Name	Causes	Symptoms in Children	Some Details	References
Ekila (yama)	Consumption of tobacco during pregnancy	Sickness; Coughing; Pregnancy eats child	"Of the few Aka who felt that smoking was ekila, these reasons were given: baby gets sick after birth; bad when breastfeeding because the baby gets the smoke of the ndako when mom is smoking; baby gets coughing inside the womb and diarrhea; and baby gets coughing once born. One participant mentioned that smoking was ekila, or ekila of yama (smoke), and explained it as "pregnancy eats the child." (Roulette 2010: 34).	Roulette (2010).
.kìlà	N/A	N/A	"These [the most important prohibitions] are the ones that concern parents, from when the wife falls pregnant until the child can walk. We have see which potentially malevolent or dangerous animals are the object of this .kìlà prohibition, which is remarkable in two respects. Firstly, because breaking the prohibition causes the *child* to fall ill; parents must therefore be considered as symbolically *responsible* for their child's health. Secondly, because it concerns both the mother *and the father*, both of whom must respect this food restriction. [...] The distinctive aspect of the Aka is thus clear, as is as the egalitarian conception that they have of the sexes." (Bahuchet 1985: 495, translated from French).	Bahuchet (1985).
Ekila dibongo	Extramarital sex	Illness; Death	"If a parent sleeps with someone else the child will get a specific illness, called ekila dibongo (taboo/illness of the knees), and potentially die." (Hewlett & Hewlett 2010: 116).	Hewlett & Hewlett (2010).
Ekila	Breastfed by a woman who ate taboo animal	Illness or death	"Aka mothers generally said it was important to intimately know the women who breast-fed their infants. It was important for mothers to know the foods that an allomother was eating because if the woman ate a taboo (*ekila*) food, it could cause her infant to get sick and potentially die." (Hewlett & Winn 2014: 203). Also in Hewlett (1989: 187).	Hewlett & Winn (2014)(2014).
N/A	Violation of food prohibition	Epilepsy	« La femme et son mari ne doivent pas consommer : mbémbā "antelope sp." mbēkā "singe sp." (s'ils ne respectant pas cet interdit, l'enfant qi naîtra aura des crises d'épilepsie). » (Motte 1980 : 273).	Motte (1980).

Baka

Name	**Causes**	**Symptoms in Children**	**Some Details**	**References**
ìimbì	Violation of postpartum sex and food taboo; Extramarital relationships; Thefts	Weakness; Growth delay	"The case of ìimbì […] is not a laughing matter. First, ìimbì makes infants fall into critical condition. Secondly, the parents of sick little children, especially the mothers, are apt to become the targets of blame. It is because mothers' extramarital affairs result in babies whose fathers are unidentified. According to my informants, when blood of more than two men mix in the blood of such a baby, it causes ìimbì." (Sato 1998: 41).	Sato (1998).
N/A	Dietary restrictions; Extramarital relationships	Abortion; Newborn illnesses	"Even before birth, Baka children receive attention and have a specific position in the household and the village. For example, to ensure the physical and spiritual health of the infant-to-be, both the pregnant woman and her partner have to follow several restrictions, including dietary restrictions on the consumption of wild animals and plants. Parents with infants also restrict some practices during the performance of subsistence activities (hunting, gathering, and fishing). Men are also warmed against having sexual relations with other women. Failure to follow such restrictions is believed to cause abortion or newborn illnesses. While most of these restrictions are limited to the pregnancy and the first months of an infant's life, some are prolonged until weaning." (Gallois 2015: 106).	Gallois (2015).
behe	Violation of food taboo (fish)	Fever; Wheeze	"Behe is an unidentified fish which brings sickness to children when the parents eat it. Children with the sickness of behe develop a fever and wheeze." (Hattori 2006: 48).	Hattori (2006).
N/A	Violation of postpartum sex taboo	Sickness; Death	"During this time, the husband and wife are not to have affaires with others. If they do, the child will get sick and even die. If the husband has an affair and the baby gets sick, he may save the life of the child by washing him or her in some medicine. In a small tub, the father will wring some túkusà (a kind of vine) leaves in the water, which will then become thick, and will bathe the baby with his right hand while his mistress washes with her left hand." (Leonard 1997: 41).	Leonard (1997).

Mbuti

Name	Causes	Symptoms in Children	Some Details	References
Ekoni	Violations of food taboos	New-born deformations; Delivery problems	“If a deformed baby born, it is impossible to cure her/him. “When a baby is born with an abnormal state unfortunately, the parents think over what they did during the pregnancy.” (Ichikawa 1987: 103).	Ichikawa (1987, 1998).
Kuweri	Eating prohibited meat	Sickness of parents and child	“The "soli" of "lokobasoli" means Bongo (Boocerus euryceros), and the parents who have a baby are forbidden to eat the meat of "soli". I f they eat it, their baby or they themselves will be taken ill. This inhibition can be included in the category "kuweri" among the Mbuti's food restrictions which have been revealed by Ichikawa (1977). If a man or woman has eaten the "soli" meat committing the inhibition, the offender chips the bark of the "lokobasoli" and applies it to the nose in order to prevent or cure the illness*.” (Tanno 1981: 42).	Tanno (1981).
N/A	Eating *Cercopithecus lhoesi, C. hamlyni, C. wolfi denti*	Fever; Death	“Adults of child bearing age, may not eat the flesh of these species, in order not to give their children (including their unborn babies) such a strong fever that they might die.” (Carpaneto & Germi 1989: 16).*	Carpaneto and Germi (1989).
N/A	Violation of postpartum sex taboo	N/A; Concerns about the mother’s health	“Since Kamaikan was nursing a child, Ekianga was under an obligation not to sleep with her, and his two other wives were happy that at last they could expect him to pay them some attention. But to everyone's dismay he continued to sleep with Kamaikan. And one day Amabosu started making loud remarks across the camp about his sister's health.” (Turnbull 1961: 121).	Turnbull (1961).

Efe

Name	Causes	Symptoms in Children	Some Details	References
Eke	Violations of food taboos	Death; Bleeding; Newborn deformations	"Family-based taboos, a major category of taboos in the Ituri, are beliefs that are quite dangerous to violate since the consequences include the death of the consumer, his/her child or other relatives, or the violation of a relationship between the clan and supernatural entities. […] Another major category of taboo surrounds pregnancy and tends to involve the homeopathic principle of contagious similarity between an item consumed by the mother and anomalous characteristics acquired by the fetus, discovered when the mother delivers. For example, during pregnancy a woman may have to refuse a certain type of forest antelope because its skin is "red", and will cause her to bleed profusely during childbirth." (Aunger 2004: 147).	Aunger (2004).
Eke	Violations of food taboos	Fever; Convulsion; Fainting	"If the parents eat such animals no matter whether intentionally or carelessly, the child will be caught by eke which may kill the child. Some animals are said to bring eke only if the father kills them or looks at them in the forest." (Terashima 2001: 52).	Terashima (2001).

Ntomba/Twa

Name	Causes	Symptoms in Children	Some Details	References
N/A	Violation of postpartum sex taboo (primiparous mother)	Severe health issues	"Her mother (and more recently her grand-mother) will stay with her and be in charge of initiating her into her new social role. As long as they inhabit the seclusion hut, both women are subject to strict sexual taboos, the transgression of which is believed to have severe consequences on the child's health. Even when she sits, the young mother must use her own stool, lest she be contaminated by the sperm of someone who, after having sexual intercourse, employed the same stool. During seclusion, the primiparous mother must not perform any physical activity related to food production and preparation. For the first few months, she will not even be allowed to walk outside the hut." (Pagezy 1990: 89).	Pagezy (1990).

Bakoya

N/A	Violation of eating fish caught by poison prohibition	Death by suffocation	«Les femmes enceintes et qui allaitent ne peuvent consommer ces poissons, le bébé pouvant, selon les croyances, subir le même sort que le poisson et s'étouffer.» (Soengas 2010 : 126). « Le seul interdit formel est celui qui empêche les femmes qui ont leurs règles de piler le manioc, d'accompagner leur mari à la chasse ou d'avoir des relations avec un homme la veille de son départ en forêt pour aller chasser. » (Soengas 2010 : 316).	Soengas López (2010).

This literature review excludes those bibliographic references that mentioned the nature of prohibitions or specific behaviours of parents, but did not explained that they have impact on the child's well-being.

*Carpaneto & Germi (1989) provide thorough and detailed list of specific consequences of consumption of taboo animals of Mbuti, but for the limited space here I extracted only one example.

Being with Pregnancy

Having children is perceived as one of the most important and fulfilling aspects in the lives of Mbendjele. Infertility is rare (Hewlett 1991a: 18), but it does occur. Those women who have children are generally very compassionate with childless women and often share caretaking of their children with them. It was difficult to find out how Mbendjele explain childlessness, since it is very sensitive issue for an open discussion.

Figure 9 Childless woman breastfeeding

Díbà is childless, but she often helps in taking care of other infants. Nonetheless, *Díbà* said that she did not like to "share her breasts too much", because she desires to keep their shape.

However, I witnessed several disputes within a childless couple. One husband was reproaching his wife's past behaviour with men. He was suspicious about her excessive sharing of her *èkìlá.* Everyone has *èkìlá* and by engaging in sexual intercourse, those involved share their *èkìlá*. If woman shares too much of her *èkìlá* by sleeping around, it can ruin her future prospects in conceiving children (*èkóndʒì*). The wife, on the other hand, reproached her husband's excessive hunting, which leads to ruined chances in hunting – *màténà* – and cause woman's *èkóndʒì,* too.

In Agland's film *"Baka: A Cry from the Rainforest"* (2012), similar views are expressed. A Baka baby, who was still being breastfed, passed away within a day since he fell ill. A healer, in this film referred to as "witch doctor", felt like she was being accused, so she shouted out loud across the camp:

> (54:55) *"If you had brought your child to me, I would have tried to heal him. It is your husband who is to blame. His reputation is known by everyone. Who is your husband sleeping with?"*

People blamed the father for cheating on his wife and about the fact that he was not present that night. This brought uncertainty on behalf of the mother and discussed it with her husband. She asked directly about his actions. While he kept denying that he was cheating on her, she concluded:

> (57:40) *"How can our marriage last? Now our child has died. You just want to get rid of me. You disappeared while we were mourning. You've been waiting for my child to die. How can you be so cruel? This marriage cannot be saved not even by bringing our child back. You've stayed away all this time while we are all mourning."* (58:10) *"If I continue in our marriage I'll remain sterile and barren."*

On a different day, a grandmother of the deceased child talked to both of the parents:

> (01:01) *"You, the parents are to blame. You were drinking too much. That can interfere with breast milk."*

This example shows that cheating on your spouse can lead to death of the child. Further, that the mother was irresponsible for not asking a help of a healer, and as the grandmother remarked, both parents are held accountable for their actions, because *"it can interfere with the breast milk".* Moreover, if the mother continues with this marriage, she risks being sterile and barren.

***

If a Mbendjele woman gets pregnant (*yémù*), she has the free choice to decide whether she wants to keep the baby. My informants liked to say:

Yɛ́mù	***yà***	***dìɛ́***	***mò-ndɔ́***	***w-á***	***bà-ítò!***
7.pregnancy	7.3SG	be.PRS	3-issue	3-POSS	2-woman

'Pregnancy is an issue of women.'

Thus, her husband does not need to even know about her first month of pregnancy, since these issues are often discussed without men being present, for example during gathering trips in female groups, or in private setting with a close friend. In some cases, women meet a childbirth specialist to ask for her opinion about the appropriate course of action.

During the first month of pregnancy, the embryo is called *dʒòánì* and abortions (*bùká yémù, "breaking pregnancy"*) during this stage are common and generally accepted. However, after the first month, Mbendjele call the unborn baby *mòéfɛ̀* and the belief takes shape is already a human being. Thus, abortions should not take place during this stage of pregnancy. If the abortion during the first month of pregnancy was unsuccessful, Mbendjele believe that the child is demanding for his or her life, holding onto it and should come into this world:

Mò-nà	***à***	***mpìá***	***dèʒà,***	***à***	***ndìngá***	***mò-kílí.***
1-child	3SG	hold.PRS	already[FR:déjà]	3SG	want.PRS	3-world

'The child already holds her/himself, s/he wants the world.'

Attempts to abort the child in later stages of pregnancy can cause *èkóndʒì*. In other words, the mother or the child can die, or there are complications during the delivery. Consequently, the child is born weak, small, and prone to illnesses. Similar views might be held by the !Kung as well – if the !Kung mother gets pregnant, she weans the toddler in the *second* month of pregnancy (Howell 2010: 27).

Pregnancy is a normal stage in women's lives and pregnant women do not enjoy any sort of privileges. Women are expected to engage in same economic productivity as when they are not pregnant. There are, however, exceptions in cases of complicated pregnancies where other women, usually close family – sisters or mothers share some of their food. Not all complicated pregnancies mean *èkóndʒì*. However, the causes of complications or reasons for feeling unwell have to be clearly defined in order to avoid suspicions.

Mbúmà explained that it is easy to recognise if the other woman is pregnant by looking at the gleam in women's eyes, which is believed to change with pregnancy (*mísɔ̀ nà màí, "eyes with water"*) or by bigger pupils (*"mò-ngɛ̀lɛ̀ m-ábòlé"*). But in general, women track each other's menstruations and know who was not yet been with the moon in a particular month (that is how Mbendjele refer to menstruation):

Àmɛ́	***dìɛ́***	***nà***	***wɔ́dì.***
1SG	be.PRS	with	moon

'I am with the moon.'

Sɔ́ngé	***à***	***mpìá***	***(à)mɛ́.***
9.moon	3SG	touch.PRS	1SG

'The moon touches me.'

Unlike Batek (Endicott & Endicott 2014: 110), Mbendjele women during their pregnancies have to follow a range of food avoidances and follow numerous rules in order to secure the child's health and proper development. Similar to Mbuti's food avoidances (Aunger 2000, 2004; Carpaneto & Germi 1989; Ichikawa 1987, 1998), most of these food taboos are based on sympathetic magic, which are grounded in the notion of similarity and contagion. Women are not allowed to eat certain animals in the belief that the child will take on characteristics of those species. Aunger calls them "homeopathic taboos" (Aunger 2000: 452). This applies particularly to species that have peculiar body shapes or produce strange sounds, or domestic, village animals which are associated with Bilo, considered as *"animals of dirt"* (*"nyama ya mbindo",* see Lewis 2002: 212).

Cravings for specific foods during pregnancy were understood as demands of the baby and women often gathered these specific foods to please child's demands. When it comes to alcohol (*mà-lɛ́kú*), drinking moderate amounts of palm wine (*mò-lɛ́ŋgɛ́*) are understood as vital for the baby's healthy development. Nonetheless, getting drunk (*mò láŋgá*) is understood as harmful, as it can provoke future "stubbornness" (*mò-súkú búdì*) and "aggression" (*mò-kétì; bélí*) to the unborn the child. Consuming tobacco (*"ɲóà ndákó", "drinking tobacco"*) is believed not to be good for the unborn baby, which is consistent with the Aka (Roulette 2010; Roulette, Hagen, et al. 2016). According to my informants, occasional smoking in pregnant women is *not* associated with *èkìlá* or *èkóndʒì*. Only excessive smoking can lead to birth complications and death.

Violations of proper spousal relations can also lead to *èkóndʒì.* For example, pregnant women should not flirt with other men than their husbands. Flirting is often referred to by the expressions of "playing" (*"sànà nà bà-tòpáì", "playing with men"*). They should not "walk all over the place" (*támbòlá nà kílíkílí*) – or as Hewlett & Hewlett (2008: 53) refer to it – they should not be "walking about". Mbendjele often use this expression to refer to those people, who avoid working and just walk around and chat with people. If the woman is believed to walk all over the place, her husband can get jealous and suspicions about the wife's intentions. Importantly, such behaviour is more likely to occur in the village environment, where it is more difficult to track who is where. Apart from open disputes with one's husband, if repeated, "walking all over the place" can also cause *èkóndʒì.* Importantly, avoidance in flirting and "walking all over the place" applies to husbands, too, as they can provoke *mà-ténà,* and, thus, risk the life of the wife and unborn baby, too.

A similar issue occurs if gendered labour roles in spouses are disregarded. I will explain this by giving an example: it is the wife's role to prepare food, and the husband's role to sharpen her tools. Normally, if the wife for example slices *kɔ̀kɔ̀* (*Gnetum*) leaves, she gives her cutting tool to her husband to sharpen it. It should not be any adult man other than her husband (if he is present). If this rule is broken, her husband can get upset:

Kénèkénè	***à***	***dìé***	***mò-tòpáì***	***w-àŋgóɸé?***
now	3SG	be.PRS	1-husband	2SG.POSS

'Is he your husband now?'

Such actions, if repeated, can also cause *èkóndʒì.* There are many such rules, and sometimes women do not follow them. If this happens, a specialist in healing *èkóndʒì* is called for help in order to "undo" the possible consequences. This, however, does not mean that women can easily break the taboo, and simply ask healer to fix the problem. A woman normally has to pay an *èkóndʒì* healer for helping, if the healer does not decide to offer help without payment (see Lewis 2015 for the Mbendjele economy of specialised knowledge). Moreover, success in healing *èkóndʒì* is never completely guaranteed. Thus, these rules should be taken seriously and treated quickly.

Mother's and Child's Birthing

"To give birth" and "to be born" are refered by a single expression of *"bòtá"*. Both the mother and the child must be ready for the delivery to be successful. Giving birth from an Mbendjele perspective, is a process that involves active participation of both the mother and not-yet-born child. When it is the right time, other women boil water, clean the room where the delivery is to take place, and call other women to help.

During deliveries only women are present. If the delivery takes place in the village environment and the house has more than one room, the husband and other children may stay in the separated area. Children are not allowed to see the delivery, but adolescent girls are sometimes let in. Usually, the sisters and mother of the pregnant woman assist in delivery. In cases of complicated deliveries (*"bòtɛ́dì nà búdì", "giving birth with hardness"*), elderly and experienced women or childbirth specialists are called to help, even from distant villages.

The expectant mother delivers in a squatting position (!Dobe Kung also give birth in this position, perhaps to minimise suffering; cf. Howell 2010: 24), while fresh *Marantaceae* leaves (*mò-ŋgóŋgó*; also mention about Baka in Hattori 2006: 47) are placed under her on the floor and she supports herself with the walls of her house walls or with the help of other women – one squats on the left side and holds expectant mother' leg, while the other woman does the same with her other leg. If the delivery takes place in the forest, the woman holds onto a special young tree, which has deep roots and is very flexible (see Figure 10).

However, there were also cases when women gave birth alone (*"bòtɛ́dì nà ɸó"*), without any assistance. The ideal !Kung delivery is solitary and in case of Efe in group (Konner 2016: 132). Mbendjele women did not explain to me what is the proper setting in their view, but emphasised that if the woman gives birth to their first child, it is good to be around and help. Hardin (2000: 357) observed that: *"I showed her popoko, a plant you grill on the coals of a fire and then, with its powder, you can treat yourself for the period before childbirth, so that you will have no problems with the delivery, even if no one else is around to take care of you."*

Soon after the baby comes out, the umbilical cord (*tóngú; "tɔ̀ngú"* in Motte 1980: 339) is cut, but only to about 30cm. The mucus is taken out from the baby's mouth with the finger and the main woman who helped in the delivery cleans the baby in pre-boiled water and wraps her or him into clean clothing.

During the deliveries that I have witnessed, it was not common to place the baby on the mother's body. This accords with the observation of Efe by Tronick et al. *"Efe mothers do not hold their newborns immediately after birth because of the belief that harm will come to the infant if she is first held by the mother."* (1987: 99). Usually, each of the women took the baby for a while, smiled, and talked to her/him, I did not see, however, that women would offer their breasts as Efe (ibid), only joked about how the baby licks the lips in search of breast and inserted fingers in his/her mouth.

If there were problems with the placenta, women were asked the mother to chew a piece of dried earth from the wall of the house (*èkángè*). Also, hot charcoal wrapped in clothing (previously soaked in water) is placed on the mother's belly. If this technique is inefficient, one of the women presses the belly with hands, or with feet. If even this does not work, placenta is gently pulled out with hands.

Making too much noise while giving birth is believed to be dangerous for the child. Once, one woman was very noisy during a night in the village. Elder women were worried and explained they woke to take that young woman to the forest. They scolded the woman: !Kung women also value giving birth without a fuss (personal communication of Richard Lee in Sylvain 1999: 218).

Díká	***mò-búlú!***	***Bòtá***	***mò-nà***	***bìɛ́n!***
stop.IMP	3-disorder[LG:mobúlú]	give.birth.IMP	1-child	good[FR:bien]

'Stop the disorder! Give birth properly!'

Ò	***kìlá***	***mò-nà***	***nà***	***bó?***
2SG	refuse.PRS	1-child	for	what

'Why are you refusing the child?'

Figure 10 Pretending birth-giving

Mbúmà demonstrates how the pregnant woman should hold herself to the tree *bàngwà-ngɔ́lɔ́*. Mbuti women also engage in such practices when giving birth in the forest (Turnbull 1976[1965]: 129).

After the baby is born, the mother's sisters and close family help in all activities that she usually engages throughout the day: cleaning the house and sweeping its surrounding areas, washing clothing and cooking utensils, gathering extra food and preparing meals for the elder children together with specific foods for the mother. The mother should avoid solid foods and meat, only drinking diluted broth or eating easy-to-digest meals of mashed yams are desirable (similar practice also among !Kung; see Howell 2010: 25). Consuming a lot of broth and watery food (also palm wine) is believed to fill up the breast with milk (*"bɛ́lɛ́ màlóndɛ́", "full breasts"*).

The baby is not breastfed (*"kàbá mài má bɛ́lɛ́", "sharing breast water", "mai na dibele"* by Aka, mentioned in Hewlett & Winn 2014: 203) until the umbilical cord dries out (*tóngú à-búbá*) – they explained that the child eats the food from the umbilical cord and that is also the time till the mother's breasts fill up with "breast water". Before this time, those women who keep the baby company insert their fingers into the baby's mouth when they see that he or she wants to suckle (*ɲóáŋgà*).

Women in Djoubé *tied up* the wrists of babies with strings (*"kàtá mò-kódì / è-màmì", "tying strings / bracelets"*; mentioned also in Lewis 2002: 127) in belief that the child will be strong and healthy. According to Turnbull (1965: 130), Mbuti also tie these sorts of bracelets to *"give the child the strength of the forest."* Mbendjele metaphors of "tying" are very important across diverse domains, and are associated with women, as opposed to men who engage in "cutting" (for more on this issue see Lewis 2002: 113-114). Tying strings around the belly is common also during the pregnancy and serves to protect the unborn baby (see also Motte 1980: 325), after the child is weaned, women tie a liana string around the body at breast-height (Heymer 1980: 198).

It is considered a tragedy whenever a baby is born handicapped or in a poor health. Once, a baby without eyes and deformed face was born. It was a terrible suffering for the parents. People were very empathetic while in the presence of the parents, but the rumours held that it was a clear case of *èkóndʒì*. The causes of *èkóndʒì* were unknown, but people speculated over the father's infidelity and the mother's attempts to abort the child. The baby passed away in several weeks, and the couple divorced. The woman left to a distant village where her mother lived. I have never seen them again. Events such as these brought open discussions on *èkóndʒì*. A few days after this incident, while on a gathering trip, I have seen *Mbúmà* scolding and warning a young girl who wanted to abort a child in later stages of her pregnancy.

On the other hand, it is an incredible joy when a healthy baby is brought into the world. Mbendjele desire male and female babies equally, what matters is his/her healthiness. Healthiness of the child is associated with her/his bigness and fatness (see Figure 11). The bigger and fatter the child, the healthier s/he is, for the !Kung strength is measured by children's legs (Marshall 1960: 329). The best nourishment is believed to be achieved by frequent breastfeeding (also mentioned Marshall 1960: 329 about !Kung). Mothers apply specific medicines if the child is born "small" to secure s/he will gain

strength. Similar views might be held by Efe, too, since the Efe intensify their care for infants with lower weight (Tronick et al. 1989: 193).

Figure 11 *Màpwándá* – baby full of healthiness

Grandmother *Sɔ̀pɔ̀* proudly shows off *Màpwándá* – healthy, big, strong, and happy baby. Women lavishly laughed what a strong "suckler" *Màpwándá* is – always hungry, always with a desire for big bouts of breast water.

These instances happen without any particular celebration – there are no public announcements about the new member of the community. However, women from different neighbourhoods stop by and ask about the delivery, so as to see the baby. Elder women recount the details; in some cases, they would laugh if the woman had been "walking too much". Walking a lot or running is believed to quicken the delivery or it is interpreted that the child was running around in the belly and the soon-to-be mother ran on her/his demand. Bilo women also visited "their" Mbendjele women and gave gifts to the mother: piece of clothing, salt, jewellery, cubes of chicken stock, or other items, generally perceived as valuable. Such moments made me think of how these, often very problematic, inter-ethnic relations between Bilo and Mbendjele are almost 'forgotten'. Giving birth is what women do – both Bilo and Mbendjele – during these moments I felt a true female solidarity and merriment, which overcame conflicts between the two groups.

The mother usually rests in the shade. This however, depends also on her age of the mother and how she feels physically after the delivery. Some mothers went gathering foods or laboured for Bilo in their fields the day after the delivery – one mother just a day after delivery went to labour. Other women remarked that it is her sixth child, and that she *knows* already how to give birth.

The baby, however, was never left alone (see also Meehan et al. 2017). Children and elder siblings would excitedly keep new-borns company. They could spend hours talking about who was going to hold the baby first, how she or he should be named, who is he or she was going to play with or have children with in the future. Even though older children were allowed to stay around the baby, there was always at least one adult present. Women explained to me that even though older children loved babies, they still did not understand what it meant to take care of an infant, and children in groups can create lots of noise and fights, and something bad could happen to the infant (Fouts et al. 2012: 128).

It can take several weeks before a name is chosen for the new-born. Sometimes the child receives several names, or his or her name is changed after a while. Mbendjele, in comparison with Bilo, did not place any importance on naming children after his or her father or mother. Often, the same person presented himself with different names to

different people. One Mbendjele can have a different name when speaking to the Congolese authorities, a different name when speaking to Westerners, different one for Bilo-foreigners, and several names if attending an outsider-imposed school (I will address this issue in more detail later in this thesis).

However, the name of the child is sometimes chosen after somebody else's name. This cultural practice is called *móló*. *Móló* creates a special relationship between the new-born and the person who shared his/her name. The !Kung's cultural practice of "namesakes" seems to be similar. For further details, read Marjorie Shostak's *Return to Nisa* (2002), and Nancy Howell's (2010: 24–25) *Life Histories of the Dobe !Kung,* or Lorna Marshall's paper on the !Kung kin terminology (1957). *Móló's* profound function is an establishment of specific economic and care-taking roles. I will illustrate it on an example. If my friend gave birth to a baby and named her/him Daša, I would have special responsibilities towards this baby. For instance, I should share more food with her/him; or I should be one of the first who take responsibility over taking care of this child in mother's absence. At the same time, I should be able to rely on this child if I need help. In other words, *móló* brings un-affiliated people together by creating fictive family-like ties. Often, Mbendjele extend this practice in relationship to Bilo (see also Hanawa 2004; Rupp 2011: 167), and Westerners, too. This relationship is primarily based on its economic benefits. There were three children named after me (one Milo and two Mbendjele), which meant that I was expected to give specific gifts to these babies. In Djoubé, there is also little Carlos (the namesake of my friend, photographer who assisted me with the research), Haneul (the namesake of Haneul Jang), Adam (the namesake of Adam Boyette), and Hanawa (the namesake of Rosei Hanawa), who worked in Djoubé, too (see also Figure 12).

Takeuchi (2013: 176) observed that Aka infants:

> "are not considered to be complete humans and in fact are thought to be wandering in a very vulnerable existence somewhere between life and death. *Aka do not name a child for as long as half a year after birth*. This may be due to the high infant mortality rate or because the care and protection of a parent is provided for an infant who is suspended at the edge of the human world between life and death." (Takeuchi 2013: 176; my emphasis).

While during my fieldwork I have seen that women indeed acknowledge the vulnerability of infants and engage in various medicinal, purification, and cleansing actions that are to protect the child from potential illness and death, my observations do not accord with the view that the newborn is not considered as human. The unborn baby is already seen as a person, capable of making demands for specific food while in utero, s/he also decides when they want to be born. Not naming an infant up to a half a year after birth can simply signal that naming the infant does not need to play an important role. Even so, as mentioned above, Mbendjele can change their names according to their liking or have different names in different social contexts.

Figure 12 My *móló* child – an Mbendjele Daša

Àɸélà (on the left), a mother of *Daša* (baby on the left) explicitly asked me to include this photo in my thesis. I am expected to provide, help and take care of her daughter *Daša*. It's a lifelong responsibility and if I go back to Djoubé, I shall not forget gifts for the baby as well as for the whole family.

The new-born is refered to as *mòlépé* (*"mo.lepe"* in Takeuchi 2013: 176) or *èlέngέ*, or descriptively as *mònà màbó — "the child who needs to be held".* This term precisely corresponds with reality – these children are never let alone (see also Meehan et al. 2017). The infant is carried in a cloth sling in different positions. An essential

consideration is that the child has direct access to the mother's breast and can be breastfed on demand (see also Konner 1976 for !Kung). In this way the child's demands continue to be responded to. Firstly, it demanded life; then it demanded specific foods while mother was pregnant; and continues to make demands also after coming to this world.

The appearance of toddlers is very important to their mothers (see Figure 13). They make bracelets (*èmàmì*), necklaces (*màyákà*), they pain them with pigments, and various body decorations, generally referred to by *"mòŋdʒélé"*. They also like to use kernel palm oil (*màdí má díká*) to make them looking beautiful. In general, kernel palm oil is one of the most important cosmetics in an Mbendjele culture. Colin Turnbull also refers to its importance in the perception of beauty (Turnbull 1961: 164; 190; 211). Its shininess makes illusion of fatness and healthiness, valued characteristics of Mbendjele view on beauty and attractiveness.

Figure 13 Toddler make-up

Toddler's beauty is very important for the mothers. They often decorate their toddlers together. In this picture, eyebrows are highlighted with black pigment. On that day, many other toddlers were painted the same way, and their mothers used the same pigment to paint their bodies and faces as well.

The baby should not be exposed to direct sunlight in its first month – the forest is the ideal to place to be, since it provides a lot of shade. "Sharing breast water" (*kàbá mài má bélɛ́*) with children who are not your own is a routine phenomenon. Also, shared caretaking (*bómbà mònà*) of children is practiced on a daily basis. In the literature it is called allomaternal care (Hrdy 2005), and it is extensively practiced in Central African hunter-gatherer groups (Hawks 2011; Hewlett 1989, 1991a, 1991b; Ivey 2000; Meehan 2009; Tronick et al. 1987). If women go as a group on a gathering trip, they tend to organise themselves, who stays in the camp or village to take care of the children, there is always at least one adult in the camp who looks after children (Tronick et al. 1992: 570). It is also common to see a woman leaving her child with another woman, while going just for a short period of time to the forest or to the field. However, if mother stays for too long, she can receive complaints that she *"left her child to guard for too long"* (*Díká-ká mò-nà nà kóndʒà téé͡é.*). Once even *Mbúmà* asked to get paid with fish for caring a baby who was not her grandson (Jang, 2016, personal communication). Table 12 exemplifies on different vocabulary that is employed to care-taking.

Table 12 Vocabulary of care-taking

bò-kóndʒà	"Looking after/Guarding children" – Refers to alloparenting, when the mother or father is not present.
bò-bòmbá	Literally "packing", "en-wrapping", or "keeping". Interactive care-taking that involves active engagement with the baby who needs to be held yet – includes holding, touching, talking, and singing.
bò-bàtsìá	"Protecting". Used also in different contexts – for example, protecting Bilo fields from theft.
bándá nà mísɔ	"Following with eyes" – Taking care of toddlers and young children, or recently weaned children that would not yet be safe walking alone in the forest.
bándá nà màlùí	"Following with ears" – Involves care-taking of older children, independently walking and running children, children in mixed age and gender groups.
bò-kàná bò-ɲɔŋgɔ	"Putting Deliciousness" – lavishing, hugging, cuddling' (often employed in *Caterpillar Moon* (Simmons 1995)

Caretaking of orphaned children is also explained by using 'sharing' vocabulary. It was explained to me, that in cases of orphaned children (*síló*), normally siblings of the parents take care of the children. Orphaned children are generally understood as having *"sad head"* (*mà-wà mò-súkú*) and their mis-behaviours are often justified as lacking proper parenting (*ɸóŋgà nà búdì, "Growing with hardness"* or *ɸóŋgà nà mà-wà, "growing with sadness"*).

Toddler is started to be fed with more solid foods when comes into developmental stage which is called *mònà kílíkílí – "the child all over the place".* At this stage, the child's teeth come in. It is manifested through attempts to put objects into his or her mouth. This is understood as child's demand on eating different foods. While meat is seldom given, mashed yam meals are often offered. Mother usually premasticates the food and sometimes feeds the toddler from mouth to mouth. Gradually, however, mother gives pieces of food into child's hands, so the child tries to feed herself.

During this stage, mothers sometimes give a little bit of palm wine to their toddlers, which is believed to help them to calm down, or put them to sleep. Also, I repeatedly witnessed that when, for example, husband asked his wife her cup of alcohol, she quickly poured a little into the mouth of her baby and only then she shared the cup with her husband. Hewlett also observed Aka fathers giving palm wine (*"mbolu"*) to their infants (1988: 270).

Women are very careful in keeping appropriate birth spacing (see also Figure 14). The ideal period between the pregnancies is about three to four years. Women describe it as it is important for child to be independent, strong, healthy. This is not when child begins to walk, but at the time the child is capable to run, or walk in the forest. Until that time, couples should not make love in order to prevent another pregnancy. If this takes place, however, woman has two choices. She either aborts the pregnancy and continues to breastfeed her toddler, or keeps the pregnancy and weans the toddler. It is *èkóndʒì* to maintain breastfeeding toddler while being pregnant (cf. Howell 2010: 27). The woman risks the death of herself, her unborn baby, and/or her toddler

Figure 14 About birth-spacing

In this picture you can see mother *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́* and her baby *Mòsúkú*. One morning, we had been having women's talk, together with some other women. The conversations were elicited through a visit of one Milo woman. She approached me, because she recently gave birth and asked if I have by any chance menstrual pads as she was still bleeding. I had menstrual pads, tampons, and even menstrual cup. I explained how Western women use it and we had a lot of fun. After the session was over, *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́* asked me if we could speak. She admitted that she might be pregnant and if by any chance tampons would help with abortion. She pointed to *Mòsúkú* and explained that she is too small yet, needs to be breastfed, and can become ill. *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́* managed to successfully abort her pregnancy (with traditional medicine), which prevented *èkóndʒì* and secured health of *Mòsúkú*.

In my experience, women often aborted pregnancy (*bùká yɛ́mù*), and continued to breastfeed the toddler, planning on having another baby when the toddler knows how to walk in the forest. If the pregnancy was aborted, this did not have a harmful impact on women's mental health. The belief is that the very same child will be born the next time. According to Kisliuk (1991: 336), Biaka believe that even in case of already born young children, they will be re-born. Similar views are shared by the Aka Adolescents, who see the death of a baby as a temporary good-bye: *"until that child returns, either to the same mother, or another or another woman in the same camp"* (Hewlett 2005: 331). The return of the child is recognised by a characteristic scratch, or birthmark (Hewlett 2004: 56). Thus, the child only waits for the right time to be born.

As remarked by one informant in Fouts et al. (2005: 33): *"when one mother was asked, "When will nursing end for your son (four-year-old)?" she laughed and said, "Only he knows. Ask him. I cannot know how he thinks/feels."* Weaning, this normally occurs on demand of the child (Fouts et al. 2001, 2005, 2012; Fouts & Lamb 2005: 315). However, if the woman keeps the pregnancy, she is forced to wean the toddler, or she risks illness or death of all three of them – mother, unborn baby, and the toddler. In such cases, mother applies macerate made of specific medical plants of repugnant taste or smell, so the child will not enjoy breastfeeding anymore. Occasionally, Bilo weaning techniques are employed – such as applying chilli powder (Haneul Jang 2016, personal communication, December 1).

In case of absence of pregnancy, mother often continues to breastfeed the child for a longer period of time. However, this is not always considered as a proper action and it is gossiped or mocked about (both by adults and children). Konner mentions that the !Kung continue to breastfeed past the age of five (Konner 2016: 126). If the child for some reason refuses breasts when it should be breastfed, women encourage him/her by applying *"sweet milk"* (*lélé èlέngí*) squeezed from a plant *sèŋgèbó* on their nipples.

Similar to other immediate-return egalitarian hunter-gatherers (Barr et al. 1991; Konner 1972), Mbendjele are rapid in responses to infants' cry and very good in soothing crying rapidly, not by mothers only (Hawks 2011; Tronick et al. 1987: 100). The caregiver: *"begins yodelling louder than the baby and often firmly pats a percussive rhythm on their back."* (Lewis 2013: 55). At the same time, the woman puts her breast into the child's mouth. My informants reported hunger (*ʤàlà*) or desire for specific foods (*mpósà*) as most frequent reason why their children cry. If a child cries for this reason, mother tends to give the desired food to the child if she has it.

In contrast with the observations of Fouts et al. (2004: 462), I have witnessed that Mbendjele mothers can react negatively if the child continues on crying for too long. The mother's negativity in this context surprised me at first – Pygmies are in general considered as very indulgent carers (Hewlett 1991; Tronick et al. 1987) – but later it was explained to me that child's uncontrollable cry can refer to suspicions of *èkóndʒì*. This means, that mother's negativity towards child's persistent cry could be understood as her being scared that others would be referring this crying to *èkóndʒì* – implying that her or her husband did something wrong. Fouts & Lamb (2005: 320) also observed

some occasional instances when Bofi forager mothers reacted negatively to the child's crying and fussing behaviours. The authors suggest that it may be due to the individual tendencies of that particular child for crying, fussing and insecurity.

This is consistent with Soltis (2004: 443; my emphasis) who remarked that: *"Infants who cry excessively (i.e., those with colic) have been described as sicker, as healthier, and as in no other way <u>different</u> from their counterparts without colic."* Accordingly, unusual crying was interpreted by the Aka as that the children possess *gundu* magical substance in their stomachs (Hewlett et al. 2012).

Èkóndʒì crying is also unusual. It must be a cry, which is impossible to easily explain, which takes "too long", it makes the child weak and defenceless. Such crying points to the mother-father problematic relationships. It can mean infidelity, ruined *èkìlá*, or that the couple is under sorcery. Thus, women can get very irritated if they think they did not do anything wrong and the child continues on crying. *Mbúmà* once remarked about *Àndʒélé's* irritation whose son *Àdìámbò* engaged in such crying:

À	***dìé***	***nà***	***bò-mɔ́***	***y-á***	***è-kóndʒì!***
3SG	be.PRS	with	14-fear	7-POSS	7-childbirth.complications

'She is scared of è-kóndʒì!'

È-kóndʒì	***ké!***
7-childbirth.complications	EMPH

'For sure it is è-kóndʒì!'

Crying is not the only sign of *èkóndʒì*. If the child is weak, prone to illnesses, moody, disinterested in the world around, gets in uncontrollable rage and anger, it is also a sign of *èkóndʒì*. This applies to the children who are already weaned. Mothers' and fathers' behaviour still impacts the health of even those children who are already weaned (see Figure 15).

Crying as a form of noise is associated with sickness. This was also observed about Aka by Hewlett (2005: 330): *"A 12-year-old female explained that when her father died, "I was afraid for the others, that they would die too and I stayed close to the people I loved because I was afraid." Her grandmother also "told me to stop crying or I would get sick."*

While crying in extreme cases can point to *è-kóndʒì*, laughter or smile in infants bring joy and and is immediately responded to, as well. If infant smiles women like to say that *"s/he is with a lie"* (*"à dìɛ́ nà bwàɲìà"*). I didn't understand why women would say something like that about an infant, and *Àɸélà* explained that:

À	***mɔ̀t-á,***	***à***	***bombá***	***mò-ndɔ́***	***bó***	***à***	***tí***	***ɸɔ́ɸ-ɛ́.***
3SG	laugh-PRS	3SG	hide.PRS	3-issue	that	3SG	NEG	talk-SUBJ

'She smiles, she keeps a secret that she won't tell.'

Figure 15 *Kùmù's* symptoms of *èkóndʒì*

Kùmù was behaving very odd for several weeks. She got often in disputes with her mother; refused to eat; or desired foods, which were unavailable at that season. She even beat her younger siblings; and got in rage and turned over cooking pot while her mother wasn't paying attention. Additionally, she was showing signs of physical weakness; got fevers; and then shivers.

As all these weird behaviours persisted for such a long time, suspicions of *èkóndʒì* arose. This girl had three siblings, two of them were younger. She was not being breastfed, and still – she was showing signs of *èkóndʒì*. *èkóndʒì* impacts even older children, not necessarily infants only. I did not choose a picture where the actual treatment takes place on the request of my informants. Hopefully, it at least conveys emotion – *Kùmù* has just went through one of her treatments. She is exhausted and sad. The treatment is over, but her father still holds her so she can rest.

Children's groups

Circumcision occurs, but there are no official "timetables" of when this should occur. In contrast with the circumcision in Bakoya Pygmies (*"mungala"*), Bilo were not present nor assisted with the circumcision (Soengas López 2009: 194). These acts are done by the Mbendjele, mostly the Mbendjele adolescents or young adult boys.

As mentioned above, it is children who normally decide their time for weaning . Weaning on demand makes this period less painful. Nevertheless, this does not mean that weaning is problem-free. Recently-weaned children often show distress and Mbendjele from Djoubé refered to it as *"breast jealousy"* (*mùínà bɛ́lɛ́*).

In my observation, mothers and other adult women employed several techniques to promote weanling's emotional independence. If needed, by scolding him or her; encouraging to go play with other children; or even employing *mòádʒò* mocking re-enactments (I will return to the in chapter of *Mòádʒò*).

There were also other forms of distress elicited by changes in mother's behaviour. For example, the child wanted to be held, taken on a foraging trip, or to accompany parents to the forest as s/he was used to before. Accompanying parents to the forest differs from classic gathering trips of female groups. If a couple goes to the forest, it is immediately understood as they want to have privacy. This is often one of few opportunities for them to make love. Normally, they take with them an infant who cannot walk yet. In general, non-walking children are understood as incapable of understanding sexual intercourse yet. Thus, the child who walks, or recently weaned child cannot go to the forest with parents anymore. As the childcare specialist explained to me, child *"already has eyes"* (*à dìɛ́ nà m-ísɔ̀ dèʒà*) and should not see the sexual intercourse of their parents. This is particularly painful for the weanlings if parents leave for several days hunting trip as a labour for Bilo, for example. Weanlings stay in the camp or village and others have to take care of them. These children often cried themselves to sleep – this sort of crying was referred to as *"breast crying"* (*lèlá bɛ́lɛ́*). Parents who took an "already understanding" child to their romantic trips were gossiped about.

I will go back a little more to the issue of child's understanding. Weaned child should be the child who can walk independently in the forest and can already understand the

issues. Apart from restraining these children from seeing sexual intercourse, children during this period, are restrained from entering secret paths (*ŋdʒàngà*) of adult forest-spirit plays, as well. For example, a father could take his toddler-son while male forest spirit performance preparation, this no longer applies for weanlings.

After the weaning, children tend to spend most of their times in mixed-aged-and-gender groups, as also indicated in other small-scale, hunting and gathering societies (Boyette 2013; Draper 1976; Ivey 2000; Lewis 2002; Peterson 1978; Colin Turnbull 1965). This process, is, however, gradual and there are individual differences in children. Some children prefer to stay around the mother and engage in individual play, while other enjoy spending most of their time in children groups.

If spending most of the time in children groups, the intensity of interactions between the adults and the children decreases. Children interact with adults mostly in the mornings and evenings, and when the food is served. Children listen to morning and evening public speakings (*mòsámbò),* and join adults in hunting and gathering trips. They continue to sleep in the hut or house with parents, too. Sometimes children build their own huts and sleep there together. This, however, usually takes only few days and it is considered as part of children games. In my observation, if this takes place for too long, adults like to prevent it as children can engage in improper sexual activities.

It is often rather an interaction between adults as a group and children as a group which takes place. Adults love to watch their children to sing and dance in the evenings, while they rest after eating an evening meal. However, the situation is different when serious issues must be discussed by the adults. They need a calm environment to do so. When children as a group play too loudly around, I witnessed that adults made a trade with them. For example, I have seen an elderly man who gave a cup of alcohol to a group of children who were singing and dancing, under condition that they leave to play somewhere else.

At least one adult, however, is in reach of the children, which means that he or she can monitor what the children are doing. This is important in cases when children engage in dangerous activities. On several occasions, the adult who stayed at the camp to take care of children, fell asleep or consumed alcohol and the group of children disappeared further into the forest. Other adults who returned back to the camp from the gathering or

fishing trip, got very upset finding out that children were not in reach. The adult was scolded for irresponsibility and adolescents were sent to find the children. Like Batek (Endicott & Endicott 2014: 112), when camping in the forest, Mbendjele adults refered to the children as *"our children"* (*bá-nà bàŋgúsú*), as if belonging to the camp as a whole. This accords with joint responsibilities over taking care of all the children.

In general, children's activities in the village differed from those in the forest. In the forest, children spent more time in gathering, fishing, pretending to cook and experimenting in actual cooking, climbing trees, chopping trees, making fires, crafting – making baskets, mats, slingshots, traps for capturing small animals, and building both large and also miniature huts.

Apart from attending outsider-imposed specialised school, in the village they spend lots of time in the cacao fields, playing around the houses, in the river, and engaging in games with more structured rules. One particular children's activity in the village is frequent harassment of domestic animals. Bilo goats are moving freely throughout the village and children throw objects at them, scare them off, laugh at their dirtiness (Turnbull 1961: 160). These sorts of play sometimes resulted in animals' injuries and caused further issues with Bilo. Also, interacting with children from "the other quartier", and the Bilo children. There is, however, striking difference in cooking or cooking-related activities in the village and the forest. It is more difficult to obtain foods around the village, apart from Bilo crops. Children tend to "steal" crops more frequently when staying in the village. This, consequently, leads to conflicts on a group level (I will go back to this in the chapter of *Mòsámbò*).

Even though lots of the time is spent in play (*màssánà*) in these groups, there are also darker sides of children's behaviour. These groups are not free from bullying. Slight teasing and mocking is acceptable and even welcomed by Mbendjele adults – they use mockery almost on a daily basis. Nonetheless, there are limits to mockery, as well. In cases when the line between the mockery and bullying is crossed, adults often scold those children who mock the other, but they also encourage the mocked child to defend himself or herself. For example, by saying:

Mɔ́t-á ***yɛ́!***
laugh-IMP 3SG
'Laugh at him/her!'

Figure 16 Activities in the forest

Children were also bullying those children, who were perceived as "privileged" by the adults. For an illustration, there was a boy (4-5 years old) who had been refused by his young mother (*Sɔ̀ngɔ̀*) and the grandmother (*Mbúmà*) was taking care of him, including breastfeeding and sharing him food the same as if she would be his mother. *Mbúmà* explained that *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀'s* head never accepted this child, since she had him with a man who was physically abusing her. *Mbúmà* and her husband *Bɔ̀kùndù* were in my observation over-protective of this boy, and often scolded children who harassed him. He was different from other children. Only seldom talked and preferred company of the adults. But when he got in the group and played with children, it often ended up by crying. The gossip held that *Mbúmà's* and *Bɔ̀kùndù'*s behaviour – their constant interventions to protect the boy – was not right, and that the boy will only become weaker/sick (*àkɔ̀ná*) and smaller (*mò-sɔ́nì*).

Mbendjele children do not play with Bilo children. Both Mbendjele and Bilo parents discourage their children in playing together. The inter-ethnic interactions between the children are limited to the adult ritual activities, when accompanying parents to labour for Bilo, and to the times of bathing. Bilo children spend a lot of time playing in the river or in close proximity to the river. If in the village, Mbendjele children go bathing three-four times a day where the interactions take place. Mbendjele and Bilo children

often get in disputes and sometimes even physical fights. This has often further consequences on Mbendjele adults, as Bilo chief and the village judge decide in what way adults can fix disrespectful behaviour of their children. Usually, by engaging in free labour for Bilo. Mbendjele-Bilo conflicts were one of the issues discussed in public speakings addressed to children.

Figure 17 Activities in the village

Mbendjele adults behave negatively towards Bilo children if unaccompanied by their parents. Adults laugh at these children, mock them, scold them, openly criticise them, or engage in judgemental conversations with those who are around about all negative aspects and features Bilo have. This is done regardless of Mbendjele children's presence. As I have mentioned in the introductory chapter, Mbendjele children also labour for Bilo – their role is mainly in delivering messages (*tìndá mò-tímá*). As Mbendjele children reported, in absence of their parents, they are treated dis-respectfully by Bilo adults, as well.

Thus, both Bilo and Mbendjele adults actively promote and encourage their children in developing stereotypes about one another. They do so by minimising social interactions of the children; by characterising members of the other group as animals lacking emotions; and by talking openly and negatively about the other group in front of or with their children. Such actions promote transmission of negative inter-ethnic stereotypes (Bloom 2013; Leyens et al. 2000; Loughnan et al. 2010).

In the previous chapter, I have mentioned that Mbendjele children often play the role of messengers for Bilo. These children's responsibilities are exercised also within purely Mbendjele contexts. Adults ask the children to assist, give, take, hand the objects, call somebody to get at a certain place. Furthermore, children are sometimes asked to do things, which adults do not want to. For example, imagine that there was a conflict among adults. It is resolved, but both parties are still somewhat agitated about the whole issue, and do not feel like communicating yet. The food is cooked and should be distributed. In normal, tense-less situation, woman who cooked would distribute the plates. However, in this case she only places food in different plates or leaves, but does not distribute them. She asks her son/daughter to do it on behalf of her.

Adolescence

Adolescents enjoy autonomy (see also Hewlett 2004). As children grow up, they tend to spend more time in same-gender groups and gradually involve more in the same activities as adults do – e.g. boys hunt, girls gather. In general, adolescents are expected to help in hunting and gathering, and if they do not do so, their behaviour is openly criticised. But there is more important job they have and that is to look for a proper spouse.

In Djoubé, both adolescent boys and girls emphasise that they would prefer a spouse from a different village. This was one of the main motivations, why these boys and girls in groups often travelled to visit different villages to fulfil different tasks, but to search for a spouse, as well. These were occasions of funerals, or commemoration ceremonies, going hunting to the forests in proximities of different villages and staying over night, a group of boys doing circumcision and travelling along the Motaba, or looking for a job in logging company, or selling *Marantaceae* leaves to Bilo. Travelling outside Djoubé also meant making new friends and establishing new alliances (Bonnie Lynn Hewlett 2012: 86–87).

Central African hunter-gatherer adolescents enjoy quite free sexual life (Lewis 2002: 74). Not-married, young adolescents are not believed to be able to conceive a child. However, there is still a possibility to conceive under sorcery. Thus, yes, sex is quite free, but this freedom has its limits as well. Especially in case of adolescent girls, whose sexual activities are monitored by mothers to a certain extent. Mothers fear their young

daughter getting pregnant, as they know the dangers of giving birth and responsibilities, which come with having a baby (Lewis 2002: 74).

Thus, sexual freedom has its limits. Both boys, but mainly girls have to be careful in terms of their sexual reputation. Engagements in too much sexual play is mocked and criticised in terms of promiscuity (*yáŋgí*). I have encountered with boys' exclamations towards such girls as:

Àmɛ́	***kìlá***	***òɸɛ́!***
1SG	refuse.PRS	2SG

'I refuse you!'

Òɸɛ́!	***kábwòl-á***	***nà***	***bà-tò***	***tú!***
2SG	share-PRS	with	2-person	all[FR:tout]

'You share with everyone!'

For example, Turnbull writes about about one couple – they were seeing each other more often that was allowed by customary flirtation (Turnbull 1961: 207). During sexual intercourse, couple share their *èkìlá.* In general, it is not good to share too much of your *èkìlá.* As mentioned above, this sort of behaviour in girls can lead to (future) childlessness (*èkóndʒì*) or can ruin boy's (future) hunting success (*màténà*). In my observation, those girls who shared too much of their *èkìlá* had difficulties in finding a spouse or maintain a stable relationship. Mothers can get furious hearing commentaries about their daughters' promiscuity.

Haneul Jang reported that when camping the forest, her daughter left to the village and stayed too long. And so, the mother went to the village and brought her back to the camp. This happened on a regular basis. They can even engage in beating their daughters or shout public speaking (*mòsámbò*) – venting their anger by criticising such comments or denying "sluttishness" of their daughters. Colin Turnbull also mentions the importance of reputation in terms of flirting and sexual behaviours in girls (Turnbull 1961: 204–205). In my observation, adult in general can react aggressively even to animals behaving in such a way. On several occasions, adult women scolded and beat female dogs for engaging in sex with different male dogs or dogs owned by Bilo. Merrill Singer (1978) suggests that the Mbuti aggressive treatments of their dogs are culturally constituted defence mechanisms. The author, however, builds on the

ethnographic remarks of *general* behaviours of BaMbuti to dogs. While dogs are often neglected or mistreated by Mbendjele, these examples are different as they portray the employment of morally-motivated punishment.

Socially appropriate sexual activities are through specific games. For example, the courting dance *elanda,* described by Lewis (2002: 137). Flirting, touching and movements imitating intercourse take place. Open flirting during these activities is common, even required. Adults often followed these games with nostalgia and sometimes joined these games, too. This gave opportunities for older men and women to flirt a little a bit with younger ones in socially acceptable ways. Widowed and divorced women were also engaging in these games. Widowed women, despite being for example, middle-aged and having children, were also in category of looking for husbands, so this behaviour was generally accepted. In my observation, young children engage in sexual play, too. Playing with each other's genitalia is accepted to a certain extent. However, public activities such as these are stopped, laughed at, and sometimes scold upon, mainly attempts for actual sexual intercourse. Children's sexual games also involved sexual intercourse when adults were not present. Children played in this way and refered to it in terms of "giving each other their shares". Children laughed and even sang during these games, and ceased these activities if hearing an adult approaching (see Figure 19

Adolescent girls recounted on ideal husband as a good, non-aggressive man, skilled in the forest, agile in climbing trees. Some of them remarked they like men dance well and take a good control of the spirit during forest-spirit performances (*mòkóndì màssánà*). Other girls emphasized that they want a man who works for the logging company, so they would have access to money. Several adolescent girls, however, changed their opinions after having the opportunity to witness a case when a Mbendjele man with money didn't know how to hunt. Boys described ideal spouse as the one who does not "walk all over the place", the one who cooks well, who sings beautiful and who is skilled in the forest, the one who would give him lots of children. Mbendjele girls never expressed a specific desire to have relationship with skilled elephant hunter (*túmà*), or healer (*ŋgáŋgá*), or other man with specialised social status. In comparison, Bilo girls said they would want to marry boutique's owner, or chief's son, or travelling to big city to marry somebody "of great importance").

Figure 18 Adolescents flirting

Children built huts in the village, on the border of cocoa plantation. Two couples got in, teased, touched and kissed each other.

Figure 19 Children's intimate games

I do not provide a photo of actual sexual games of the children as they mostly occur in the darkness. This is, however how these games often begin. Children lay on top of each other, touch, tickle.

Figure 20 *Íngòló*

Íngòló, (on the left), *Àɸélà's* oldest daughter. After six months from now, she married a young boy from Dongou. The boy was passing through the village and stayed longer than he anticipated. He was courting *Íngòló* and stayed in our camp for several months. During that time, he was doing his best to prove what a good husband he will be for *Íngòló*, and her parents were satisfied with him as well.

The day before *Íngòló* left, I was with her and other girls in the forest. We painted our bodies with black pigment. Her teenage friends were so excited and asked her a lot of questions about their relationship. Only after that I have realised it was sort of "good-bye". The following morning, *Íngòló* and her husband simply stood up and left. At that moment, her mother took a break from pounding oil palm seeds and followed her daughter leaving, smiling, but with tears in her eyes. Nobody said good-bye, as it is impolite.

Íngòló moved with her new husband to Dongou, and during the rest of my fieldwork (about one more year) never came back to visit yet. Haneul Jang informed me that *Íngòló* returned to Djoubé with her husband. Nonetheless, after about a month, they divorced, as she met someone else.

"Togetherness" and "Togetherness Passed"

From an Mbendjele perspective, love (*bòlíŋgó*) should be the driving force in being together with/marrying someone. It is the love which leads to a real and fulfilling marriage – a marriage with healthy and happy children. People still express their opinions about others' choices, but cannot coerce them in who to marry (Markowska-Manista 2013).

Marriage is informal and often manifested by building a hut together. This is, however, not a strict requirement. The couple did not necessarily have to live in the same hut in order to be understood as married (for example, in polygamous marriages). According to my informants, marriage involves recognition and practice of specific activities and social roles. If the young couple does not start to practice these roles, the marriage often ceases at its beginning. The usual justification is that they are still just the children, not ready for the serious relationship. If the divorce would be initiated by a girl, elderly women would laugh that the boy wanted too much sex. Such speculations happened three times during my fieldwork.

These-trial-and-error short-term marriages in young adults are perceived as 'normal' (see also Figure 20). Trial-and-error marriages are common in different Pygmy groups as well: *"Mbuti marriages tend to be somewhat unstable until the first is born and indeed are not considered as marriages by Mbuti until then, separation and the formation of new unions being the rule rather than the exception."* (Turnbull, 1965b: 73).

The wife is expected to cook for her husband. However, this is not only an expectation, because woman who takes her marriage seriously would *insist on* cooking meals for her husband. Cooked meals are means of female power in marriage. Women (often as a group as well) add to the cooking special ingredients. In my observation, meals prepared from forest ingredients, not garden products. to maintain, secure, and strengthen the relationship; improve the sexual life; or prevent their husbands from searching for someone else. Colin Turnbull emphasized importance of cooking and marriage (Turnbull 1961: 142, 205, 209, 216, 237).

Cooking is not necessarily understood as wife's "duty", or a chore. The woman who takes her marriage seriously, cooks for her husband and so takes care of the marriage in powerful ways. If the couple starts the marriage and cohabit in a hut, but the young wife continues to regularly eat meals prepared by her mother and the husband at his mother's hut, the marriage is not taken seriously. This proves woman's immaturity, or lack of seriousness.

On the other hand, a serious husband eats solely meals prepared by his wife. Something similar was remarked by Robert Dodd in his fieldwork notes about the Baka: *"Whereas all other men in the camp sit in the mbanjo* [men's sitting area] *in the early evening and are served food by the women, the son-in-law must eat only the food prepared by* ***his*** *wife, and in the privacy of his own mongolu* [hut]*."* (Hewlett 1991: 27).

The exceptions are when sharing food by the whole group, or when woman sees how the meal was cooked by someone else. Also, meals prepared by husband's mother or sisters is tolerated, too. But if wife does not maintain good relationships with mother-in-law or sister-in-law, she can protest against it, as well.

Similarly, a proper wife should refuse drinking palm wine (*mòléŋgé*) from other men. Mbendjele men use palm wine as a powerful means of control in marriages. It could be understood as an equivalent to woman's cooking. This does not involve communal drinking of palm wine. But if other-than-husband would approach a married woman with his palm wine, and she consumes it, she risks, for example, falling in love with him, and so directly threatens stability of her marriage. This behaviour is understood as flirting and if repeated, can lead to *èkóndʒì*.

By sending a cooked meal to the husband, woman informs about relationship to the public. Ongoing relationships are normally known in such a community. However, such acts make it sort of 'official'. For example, there was a widowed woman *ɛ̀káŋgó* who was left with one child. She began a relationship with already married man from the other Djoubé's neighbourhood. Because she was upset about the secrecy of this relationship, she sent her child with a cooked meal to the house of her new husband. This act was a public manifestation of a marriage, arranged and planned secretly with other married and elderly women from her neighbourhood. After this, however, the 'first' wife came and began a fight with *ɛ̀káŋgó*.

I used the expression of "sending" a meal, as I never experienced the woman herself showing up at the man's hut. *Mbúmà* explained that children are good to send with messages as people would not get upset with them. By sending her child instead of going herself, *Èkáŋgó* potentially avoided an open conflict and her act was not considered as a provocative one.

There are more expectations on behalf of a married woman. A proper wife should be also skilled in sexual manipulations of her husband. While children and adolescent girls are physically capable of having sex, they do not know how to "cook penises" (*kásà èlɔ́kɔ́*) More precise translation would be "to boil" or "to cook in liquid" (Combettes & Tomassone 1978: 95). yet. A mature and serious woman who cares for her marriage, uses these skills to ascertain the strength of her marital relationship. Unlike Aka (B. L. Hewlett & Hewlett 2008: 45), Mbendjele exercise oral sex as well. On one occasion, I have witnessed a younger sibling practicing oral sex on her brother. All the women who were present were laughing, and the mother of the children quickly chastised children to stop. Later, *Mbúmà* explained to me that oral sex is a stupid way, because it does not lead to children – and that is why they were laughing.

Typically, exogamy is practiced. Unlike Efe, they do not practice sister exchange, as elaborated in the work of Colin Turnbull. However, similar to Aka (Hewlett 1991a: 27), there are tendencies to marry someone from specific locations. In case of Djoubé, there was frequent intermarriage with people from the villages of Bonguinda, Likombo, Mòmèndʒúkú.

Mbendjele engage in serial monogamies They are multilocal as well as many other egalitarian hunter-gatherers (Wood & Marlowe 2011). Nonetheless, first years of marriage are mostly matrilocal due to bride service obligations. After the first child is born, they are multilocal. Nevertheless, polygamous or polyandrous relationships (*mbàndà*) occurred. The word *mbàndà* in Bilo context means competitor in love, enemy, or brother-in-law or sister-in-law (Mfoutou 2010: 55). Polygamous relationships were more frequent than polyandrous ones. I have encountered with two polyandrous relationships with informants I had direct contact with. One of the polyandrous relationships is mentioned in the *Mòsámbò* chapter. One of the biggest fears of young Mbendjele girls was marrying a man who already had one wife. As some of them remarked, they would prefer to stay alone in order to avoid "sharing their husbands".

There is even an expression *"mísɔ̀ mà mbándá",* which means *"eyes of polygamous relationship"*. Mbendjele use this expression to refer to someone who's eyes look irritated or tired, as if after crying.

Figure 21 *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́* secures husband's love

Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́ is posing with a special make-up. She applied a juice of one plant called *pítà* on her eyelids and around. Her husband *Màbɔ́tà* left to a different village with "his" Milo, and she wanted to make sure that he will not fall in love with someone else. This make-up will make *Màbɔ́tà* think of her and only her and all the time, which will make him come back soon. *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́* explained that it will make her husband feel such a desire and feeling of deep pain and loneliness that he will surely come back to her very soon. (Please, do not be confused by the pink blusher on her cheeks as that she borrowed from me that morning.)

When man maintains relationship with two women, they should live in separate neighbourhoods, or villages. There should be avoidance between the two wives, in comparison with the Bilo context, where women typically live in the same household. In this way, both wives maintain economic independency from the other wife and largely from the husband as well. I have encountered with only one exception of two Mbendjele wives living together with the husband in Djoubé. These two elderly women were very good friends and supported each other. My informants emphasised that they knew how to play around their husband. This was, however, a very rare exception.

In general, *mbándá* is very risky. Both men and women have to be very careful about their actions and how they treat their spouse. Suspicions of childbirth complications *(è-kóndʒì)* in women and ruined hunting success (*màténà*) in men can emerge very easily. Issues related to *mbándá* were frequently treated by women healers. There was in general surprising diversity of actions women did when being in this sort of relationship. For example, in order to secure love, in order to lure husband back, or to accomplish having more children than the other wife had.

Mbendjele men offered several viewpoints on *mbàndà.* Some men avoided *mbàndà* for refraining future wives' conflicts or because they loved their wife. They also explained that it is not good to have more than two wives. When the wife is "with the moon" (menstruates) husband is not allowed to hunt, otherwise, he would ruin his hunting success (*màténà*). The prey would feel woman's smell and he would not be able to catch a prey. The more women you are in relationship with, the less you can hunt. This also points to the fact that the cosmology of *èkìlá* promotes monogamous relationships (Lewis 2002: 122).

Intra-marital disputes often happen publically, in front of other members of the group. If so, other people – mainly elders – tend to publically comment or criticise these disputes. If it's just harmless verbal dispute (*ngómbé*), people do not intervene that much. In cases of physical violence (*ètúmbá*), women, mainly elderly woman stop the man, give woman a refuge in one of their huts. In addition, elderly women harshly scold and insult the man, often with the request of leaving the camp. Men, on the other hand attempt to stop the violence by pacifying the man, but do not have courage to scold the woman and request her to go.

Couples who engage in frequent disputes often end up by divorce. Divorce is common and very straightforward. Many of my Mbendjele friends were married twice or even three times. Mbendjele refer to divorce by using the terms of refusal (*bò-kíl-à*) or simply say that the "marriage passed" (*bòlòngá bòfánà*). The reasons for divorce listed by the Mbendjele were – extramarital relationships, aggressiveness (often because of alcoholism), impossibilities of having children, and even laziness. Additionally, to refuse someone does not have to be said or claimed publically to be accepted.

Little children who need to be breastfed usually stay with the mother. I saw only one exception to this rule when one man divorced his wife, because he believed she was mentally sick. Her behaviour was uncontrollable and believed to be dangerous. For the sake of safety, the father took care of their two children.

While one was already weaned and quite independent, the other was still needed to be breastfed. As was explained to me – normally, the children would be taken care of by wife's mother in such case, or her sisters. However, in this case the wife was on *bòkòpé* – she married into the village, and her sisters and close family lived in a different village. Thus, this time father took care of the children. This act was appreciated by many single women who tried to start a relationship with this man, willing to take care of his children. These women would often send him their meals. I have heard elderly men remarking what a good mating strategy this is.

Little is known about hunter-gatherer perceptions of "insanity" or issues with mental health, stress and depression are increasingly observed in sedentarized groups, former hunter-gatherers (Dounias & Froment 2011). For example, Endicott and Endicott (2014: 119) mention a case of Batek "insane mother" but community's perceptions were not mentioned. During my fieldwork, I have encountered with two individuals who could be considered as mentally sick. Mbendjele explained the behaviours as a consequence of untreated sorcery. These individuals were perceived as dangerous and their actions were not discussed in *mòsámbò* or mimicked in *mòádʒò*. In general, people did not want to talk about it.

Responsibilities of children caretaking after divorce is often a problematic issue. Elder children from divorced marriage can decide who they would prefer to stay with (Fouts et al. 2012: 128). In my experience, there was a child who decided to stay with his grandmother instead of one of the parents. There was, for example a case when a man divorced his wife because he met another woman. He wanted to start a new family and did not want to take care of the children from this marriage, which upset the mother, as they had five children. She complained about difficulties to feed them all. The man asked the village Bilo judge to decide. After paying in meat and honey, the judge said to the Mbendjele man to pay his wife in meat.

Adulthood or "Being of Enough"

There was a question I posed multiple times to my informants: *When one becomes an adult? What constitutes the child-adult transition?* Nevertheless, I often received conflicting answers. There is no strict age-determinant, as Mbendjele are not interested in defining age in numbers. While in some cases, my informants raised "marriage" to justify one's adulthood (*àkòkáné*) as illustrated above, it is not always the case.

Contrary to Takeuchi's observation (2013: 171), having children in my field site is also not a clear identifier, as Mbendjele understand that adolescents (*àpóngáné / mándʒì*) can conceive a child if sorcery is involved. This also accords with the observation of Beatriz Soengas López among Bakoya in that: *"although very young girls are sometimes pregnant and become young mothers, they nevertheless retain the status of "small"."* (2010: 185; my translation from French; emphasis in original). While Takeuchi's observation of girls becoming women is linked to having children, the author remarks that it is not that clear with the boys: *"Even when a man who is married and has children is still considered as part of the pondi* [adolescent boy] *group if he does not have sufficient hunting experience."* (Takeuchi 2013: 171; emphasis in original).

Later on, Takeuchi makes an important point: *"Children (mo.na) are not completely independent from their parents until they reach adolescence and are not considered to be fully resistant to foods from animal sources. Their parents are also susceptible to risk that can be passed on to children."* (2013: 176). This accords with my observations of people's conversations that emerged in cases of *èkóndʒì* and my follow-up inquiries about these incidents. Children are considered "adults" when they are no longer susceptible to *èkìlá* of their parents – when there is no longer a link between adults' actions and child's wellbeing – *èkóndʒì.*

For example, during such events as in the case of *Kùmù* depicted in Figure 14, I would carefully follow people's conversations. In this case, I heard people saying: *"She is just a child."* When this conversation was over, I would ask one of the people, who were involved within it, to explain me what happened. In this case I received an answer: *"Kùmù is just a child. It is not hard to get èkóndʒì."* When I asked again why it is not hard: *"Because she is just a child. A child gets èkóndʒì quickly. If you have children and*

they are already mature, they do not get èkóndʒì." Then, I would verify these statements with others, always in a private setting.

This link of passing risk from parents to children diminishes as children's *èkìlá* grows (see Figure 21). Children who are able to walk have their own *èkìlá* (see Lewis' interview with an Mbendjele man *Phata*, in 2002: 104-105; also Lewis 2008). However, their *èkìlá* is not fully grown, or as my informants like to say, "it matures yet" (*à tádè*). During the time of not-yet-grown *èkìlá,* children are under threat of *èkóndʒì* caused by their parents. For example, a child who eats a taboo animal does not fall ill (*èkìlá* not fully grown), but s/he can fall ill on the cause of his/her parents eating the same taboo animal (because of susceptibility to *èkóndʒì*).

My observations suggest that this transition is a gradual process (as illustrated in Figure 22). Understanding what constitutes the independence of children from their parents *èkìlá*, their transition to adulthood, requires further systematic research. The above-mentioned marriage or the ability of conceiving children could be considered as mere signs of adulthood, and not as causes.

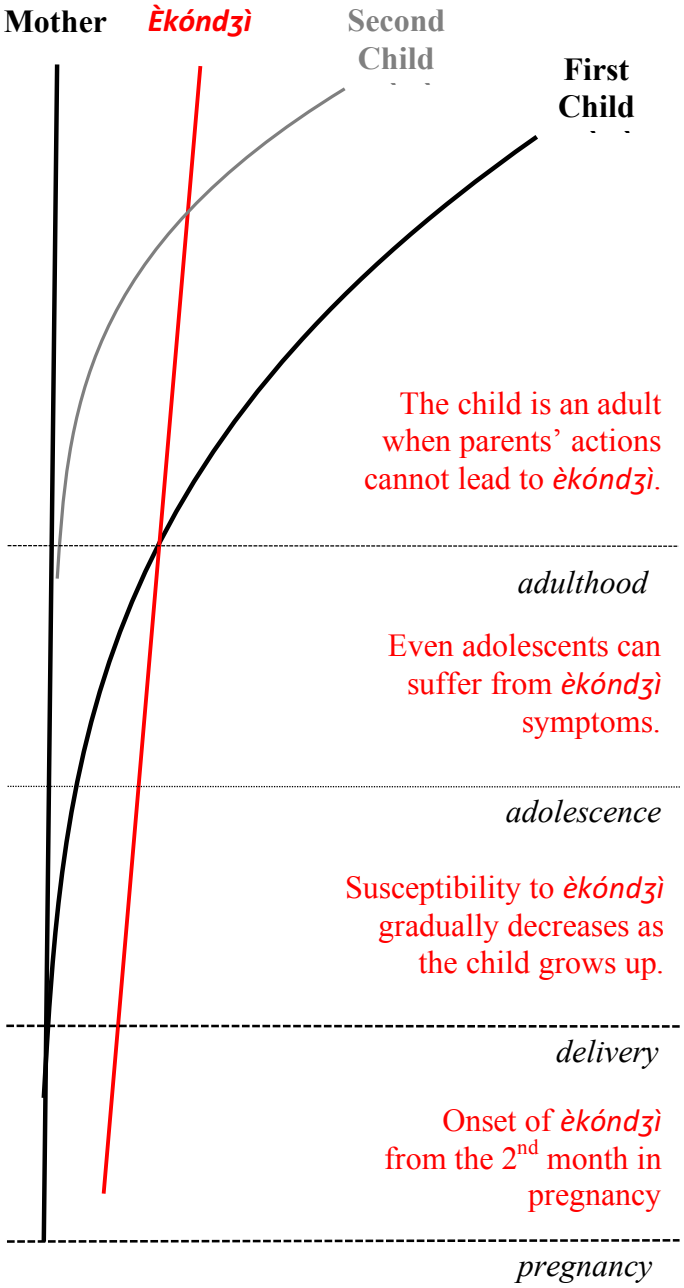

Figure 22 Child development through lens of *èkóndʒì*

Discussion

The formulaic nature of *èkìlá* beliefs is mirrored in what ways bits and pieces of *èkìlá*-related information are dispersed through ethnographic and anthropological record. The information emerged in the research of food prohibitions (Aunger 2004; Ichikawa 1987, 1988), zoologically-oriented studies (Carpaneto & Germi 1989), infant-care practices (Fouts et al. 2012; Hewlett 2016b), sexuality (Hewlett & Hewlett 2010), pregnancy and birth-giving (Pagezy 1990), in the ecological studies of (medicinal) plants (Hattori 2006; Motte 1980; Tanno 1981) and folk etiology (Sato 1998), studies into relationships between people, animals and plants (Terashima 2001), people's illnesses and causes of death (Hewlett et al. 1986). This also shows how the complex super-structure of *èkìlá* permeates, links, shapes, and explains people's understandings of procreation and birth, fertility, maturing, and death, gender roles, relationships with the people, with the animals and with the forest; hunting, eating, and healing.

Èkìlá is consistent with common features of child-rearing practices, identified as the Hunter-Gatherer Childhood model (Konner 2005, 2016; see also Hewlett 2014 and Hewlett and Lamb 2005). *Èkìlá* promotes close physical contact, maternal primacy and dense social context, indulgent and responsive infant care, multi-aged child play groups, paternal care (Konner 2016: 201). *Èkìlá* ties parents and their children into a complex web of relationships, where one's improper actions can directly affect others' health and lives. Men can cause their wives' childbirth complications and death. Women can ruin their men's hunting success or cause death. Both parents equally can threaten their children's well-being and cause their death, regardless of whether their actions were intentional or accidental (Terashima 2001: 52).

Èkìlá posits children as helpless – they "pay for" their parents' irresponsibility in following food restrictions, cheating, excessive hunting, etc. *Èkìlá* makes them innocent – they need to be indulged, cared for, guarded, protected, responded to, and soothed when needed.

The system of *èkìlá* beliefs *not only* embraces indulgent care, breastfeeding on demand, physical closeness, intensive paternal care, etc. into a complex infant/child-care-oriented theory, but also *explains and warns* about negative consequences if these

prescriptions are not followed. If one refuses to share one's breast with a baby who demands it, the child can contract deadly sickness (Fouts et al. 128). If the child cries for too long, it can point to adults' improper actions that threaten the child's health (*èkóndʒì*, *màténà*). If one cheats on one's partner (*èkóndʒì*, *màténà*), during pregnancy (Hewlett 1986: 53) or outside of it (Hewlett &Hewlett 2010: 116), s/he risks the illness or death of their children. My data also shows that this threat of negative consequences on children continues even after the period of weaning which is sometimes related to the child's independency until the child reaches maturity. *Èkìlá* protects children on their journey from the moment they exist (this is commonly understood to be the second month) until they are healthy and mature humans.

As was remarked by an Mbendjele man, Emeka, an informant of Lewis: *"It is all about children."* (2008: 299). The system of *èkìlá* promotes the best possible environment for a child's healthy and happy development. Not only are both parents are held responsible equally for their actions (Bahuchet 1985: 495), it is also believed that if parents do something improper, the chances of healing are never guaranteed, and the consequences cannot be "undone": *"Once the deformation occurs on a baby, it is impossible to cure it."* (Ichikawa 1987: 103). As remarked by Sato, it: *"is not a laughing matter."* (1998: 41). The beliefs about abortion also enhance the child's protection. Abortion in the first month of pregnancy is *not èkìlá*. The belief that the very same child will be born with the next pregnancy can have a substantial impact on the quality of care that mother can give to her toddler by avoiding mental distress.

As described by Lewis (2008: 299) *èkìlá* beliefs extend from Yaka groups, and similar practices are shared by other hunter-gatherers, as well. Though in-exhaustively, in this chapter I have referred to some of these similarities. As suggested by Power, *èkìlá* could be part of a source cosmology of African hunting and gathering groups – Western and Eastern Pygmy groups, Kalahari Khoisan groups, and Hadza, who once shared common ancestry: *"Each of these African hunter-gatherer populations bears a cultural heritage independent of the others over long time periods. If significant commonalities between magico-religious traditions were demonstrated, these could be of considerable antiquity, tracing back to source cosmologies contemporary with the emergence of modern human symbolic behaviour.* (Power 2017: 181).

Its endurance could be explained by its versatility. *Èkìlá* is a *flexible* super-structure – the list of eating prohibitions can be changed, alternated, substituted, they can differ across time and space, between and within groups (Lewis 2008: 301). This flexibility was also seen in the variation of perceptions of smoking during pregnancy by Roulette (2010: 34) who observed not only that some of his informants perceived smoking tobacco during pregnancy as *èkìlá* and some not, but also that there were individual differences in what are the consequences of *èkìlá* smoking were: for some the baby for others he or she would cough and contract diarrhoea inside the womb, or the "pregnancy eats the child". In their re-evaluation of Aka infant practices over twenty years of research, Meehan et al. (2017) have shown that despite emergent externally imposed changes – in people's access to medication and formal education, expansion of logging companies and reduction of access to land, change in subsistence patterns and diet – the indulgent nature of infant care persists: *"Aka infant care practices in this region, and hunter-gatherer infant care in general, is indicative of a much larger cultural pattern of trust, intimacy, and sharing that is not immediately affected by outside influences."* (Meehan et al. 2017: 229). This accords with the unfaltering and versatile nature of *èkìlá*: *"The ability to absorb new practices, and probably forget old ones, while integrating the new into the same ideological and moral super-structure, is part of the enduring strength of ekila."* (Lewis 2008: 301).

Understanding the nature of childrearing in contemporary hunter-gatherer groups may enlighten our knowledge of child-rearing and human development in the *Homo sapiens* groups, and of the evolution of childhood (Hewlett & Lamb eds 2005; Hrdy 1999; Konner 2005, 2016). In this chapter I hope to have contributed by illustrating how *èkìlá* beliefs of *èkóndʒì* are intertwined in the lives of Mbendjele children as they mature as well as the lives of their parents.

6 MÒSÁMBÒ

Discussing *mòsámbò's* potency in terms of child ripening is the main objective of this chapter. Firstly, I will discuss its style and protocols. Secondly, I will portray its characteristics and explore its major purposes and uses. Kimura's (1990) study of *bonango* – an *"addressee-unspecified loud speech"* among Bongando farmers in Democratic Republic of Congo, Marshall's (1961) description of !Kung's *"talk"*, and Wiessner's (2014) analysis of Ju/'hoansi daytime and night-time discourse present some similar qualities to *mòsámbò*. The similarities and differences with *mòsámbò* will be woven into this discussion, too. Thirdly, I will present and analyse *mòsámbò* that were concerning children, adolescents and young adults – and their (mis)behaviours to see in what ways *mòsámbò* shares wisdom and ripens people.

Mòsámbò Style and Protocols

Mòsámbò is an Mbendjele public speaking protocol, an organisational and problem-solving institution. However, as I have mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, its defining characteristics are based on its form and style. Practically, any complaint, criticism, commentary, or advice becomes *mòsámbò* if it adopts certain formal characteristics and aesthetic qualities that define it as *mòsámbò*. A typical *mòsámbò* starts with:

Ɔ́kà!
listen.IMP
'Listen!'

Also, there are individual differences in speaker's styles. For example, even though it was dark and I was unable to see who is speaking, I knew that it was *Màbɔ́tà* if I heard the speaking to begin with: *"Merci, mámá, pápá…"*. If speaker would not receive people's attention, s/he repeats exclaiming *"Ɔ́kà!"* or also shouts:

ʃúl-á!
look.IMP
'Look!'

The end of the speaking has to also follow a specific protocol. The following expression is used to communicate an end of the speech:

M-à ***mò-sìá!***
3-DEM.PROX 3-be.over.PRS
'This speech is over.'

Also *"angamu ncia"*, which means "mine is over" (Lewis 2014a: 231). Occasionally, it can finish by an exclamation, which is normally used to finish singing during the forest spirit plays. The speaker would shout:

Dì-sòlé!
5-break
'It's over!'

The audience would respond:

Ùéé͡é!
sensation.of.agreement
'Yes, it's over!'

It is something similar to BiAka's *"Hoya!"* and *"Ho!",* described by Michelle Kisliuk (1998: 136) during ritual events.

The speaker raises the voice or shouts; uses short sentences; and makes longer pauses between the words and phrases. The expressions are copious, redundant, repetitive, additive, and homeostatic (related to the present, or near past) – typical for oral cultures (Ong & Hartley 2012).

Loudness is a particular stylistic feature *mòsámbò,* since the speakers shout it out loud even if people are not far and could hear and understand what the speaker wants to share. This presents some similarities with! Kung's *"talk",* as described by Marshall:

> "in a voice loud enough to be heard in the two werfs, a startling contrast to the usual low flow of talk… people in the werfs went to sit at each other's scherms, forming little groups who agreed and supported each other. From where they sat, but not all at once and not in an excited babble, they made their remarks clearly, with quite long pauses between." (Marshall 1961: 233–234).

Mòsámbò can occur practically anytime of the day, if there is something that needs to be communicated. However, most speeches occur in the mornings or in the evenings. To be more precise, in relative darkness – during the dusk and dawn. It has obvious practical advantages. At these times of the day, people are not working, so the speaker can address the whole group and his voice is heard easily, because it is relatively quiet. This creates a special atmosphere. Darkness amplifies the experience of both the speaking and the listening by limiting visual distractions in full light. In the forest camps, it is common to start speaking while still on the mat in the hut. In the camp, the speaker does not need to necessarily stand out and shout to be heard. Some elders did not step out of the hut, but remained still loud while laying down.

During the speech, the speaker communicates with the listeners. For example, by asking questions, such as:

Búnɛ́ ***ɔ́kà?***
2PL listen.PRS
'Are you listening?'

Usually, they reply:

Ɛ́ɛ́͡ɛ́, ***búsɛ́*** ***ɔ́kà!***
sensation.of.agreement 1PL listen-PRS
'Yes, we are listening!'

Or, for example, later in the speech, the speaker exclaims in Lingala or French:

Lì-kútá?
5-lie[LG:likuta]
'Are these lies?'

The audience answers in chorus:

Lì-kútá ***té!***
5-lie[LG:likuta] NEG
'These are not lies!'

People from the audience interject the speech with commentaries and expressions of agreement and disagreement (see Table 13 and Table 14). Those who disagree often wait till the speech is over and start their own *mòsámbò*. Striking similarities are present

in !Kung's *talk: "Anyone who has something he wants to say joins in. People take sides and express opinions, accusing, denying, or defending persons involved."* (Marshall 1961: 233).

As was observed by Sawada (1987), within the Efe evening conversations, people tend to support each other's opinions, mostly they do not contradict the speaker: *"it seems natural for Efe men to contribute semantically to the expression of shared opinions, rather than to respond to the lead speaker with pragmatic responses."* (Sawada 1987: 95). In my observation, something similar often occurs during *mòsámbò,* mainly when the speaker communicates with the audience. So if s/he asks: *"Are these lies?",* it is *unlikely* to respond by: *"Yes, these are lies!"* Even though they show that they disagree by starting their own speech afterwards. Another similarity with the Efe is that the responses to these anticipatory statements mimic the style by matching contour, melody, tempo, and pitch of the speaker's question.

Another feature of *mòsámbò* style is that in comparison with casual speech, in *mòsámbò* people frequently employ French and Lingala expressions (see Table 15).

Table 13 Expressing agreement with the speaker

Note that *"ké"* is an emphasis marker. If *"ké"* is attached after the expression, it emboldens the intensity of (dis)agreeing.

Agreement	*Ééé͡é!*	Sensation of agreement.
	Èh-hé!	Sensation of agreement (Similar to Ju/hoan "eh-he") (Wiessner 2014: 14029).
	iiieeee	Sensation of pleasure (Lewis 2009: 241).
	Bóná!	"Like that!"
	Bóná ké!	"It's really like that!"
	Bóná kó!*	"It's true like that!" * *"kó" means true or real, the same for the Baka* (Duke 2001: 81).
	Tò bóná!	"It is just right like that!"
	Ká bóná!	"It feels right like that!"
	Vré mò-ndɔ́!	"It's truth!"

	È-ssέŋgò!	"It's a joy!"

Table 14 Expressing disagreement with the speaker

Disagreement	*Iiiiiiii*	Sensation of surprise or disgust (Lewis 2009: 241).
	uuuuooooo	A reaction to dangerous or outrageous act (Lewis 2009: 241).
	Ŋgwè-é!	Sensation of (un)pleasant surprise, shock, or pain (accompanied with specific nose scrunch*).
	Pólɔ̀!	"Nothing!"
	Pámbá!	"Rubbish!"
	Támbí!	Expression of negation: "not", "never".
	Wɔ̀té!	"There is not!"
	Wɔ̀té bóná támbí!	"It's not like that at all!"

*At first, I have misinterpreted it as a sensation of disgust, because of that nose scrunch. Often used when in pain – also in the film *Caterpillar Moon* (Simmons 1995), when the boy is getting his teeth pointed (28:33; 28:40).

Table 15 Some examples of French and Lingala expressions in *mòsámbò*

FR=French, LG=Lingala, and MY= Mbendjee Yaka

Expression	**Gloss**	**Description**
èssέngò dìrékt	MY:joy FR:direct	The speaker complains about something, and then explains how it can be solved. After giving this possible solution, s/he says that it would be a "direct joy".
À-dìέ nà kùráʒ tró!	MY:3SG-be.PRS with FR:courage FR:trop	The French word courage is often used to suggest "motivation". For example, if someone wants to gain strength for work, and smokes a cigarette "for courage". But in *mòsámbò,* it is often used to talk about someone who was "with too much courage"
Mέ, wí? Nó!	FR:mais FR:oui FR:non	The speaker talked about somebody's wrong actions. Then he asked: *"But is this ok?"* And he answered him/herself: *"No!"*

Expression	Gloss	Description
ʒàmé!	FR:jamais	In French, this word means "never". But in speaking it can also mean simply "no".
mèrsí	FR:merci	This does not have to mean "thank you", it means also that something is good, approved, correct, enjoyable.
mámá nà ngáï ééé͡	LG:mama na ngai	It means: *"Oh, my mother!"* Something bad happened and the speaker cannot believe this could possibly be true! (ééé͡ can vary in length)
Mɛ́, àtósìó!	FR:mais FR:attention	The speaker communicated about the wrong behaviours of others. This statement anticipates that s/he is going to recount on consequences of these actions.
zéró *Pámbá* *vídé*	FR:zéro LG:pámba FR:vide	With these expressions, the speaker remarks meaninglessness of people's actions, "emptiness", worthlessness, poor quality.
álɛ́	FR:allez	It could be used in a sense of "and then…" when recounting an event or a story, or an equivalent to English "so" or "thus".

While names of people are not mentioned, speakers can vent their anger by insulting people's wrongdoings in general terms. Insults are quite commonly employed in speakings – see Table 16 for some examples.

Table 16 Examples of insults in *mòsámbò*

Mbendjele insults are centred to the issues of animal-like nature and character, dirtiness, and derogatory terms usually employed by Bilo to insult Mbendjele. Note that FR=French, LG=Lingala, and the numbers are Bantu nominal noun classes.

Expression	Gloss	Description
ɲìàmà *Bà-Mbéngà* *Bà-Pìgmé*	9.animal 2-Pygmy 2-Pygmy	This is how Bilo insult Mbendjele and the Mbendjele copy them to use it sometimes as well. Perhaps the biggest insult is to compare someone with an animal.
màsó yá *èbɔ̀dú*	6.smell 7.of 7.carcass	Literally, it means "the smell of a carcass".
dʒóbà	LG:zóba	In some contexts it could be understood as rude, in some as "idiot".
Bàtó yà *sàlíté!*	2.person of dirt[FR:saleté]	"Dirty people!"
Bátó *bàpòláné*	2.person 3PL-rot	"Rotten people!"

Practically, any adult can speak *mòsámbò*. There are, nevertheless, individuals who are considered as specialists in speaking (*lìpwété*). If someone dislikes speaking in public, he or she can ask this specialist to do it in his or her behalf. Also, when strong emotions are involved. This quite differs from Bongando's understanding that: *"A man who cannot utter bonango well is not a true man."* (Kimura 1990: 16).

Everyone present, including little children, toddlers and even babies, are expected to interrupt their activities, remain calm and quiet while listening to the *mòsámbò*. *Mòsámbò* is open to all, but children and adolescents rarely address the group by means of *mòsámbò*. However, I observed that children play *mòsámbò* in the smaller versions of a forest camp they build to play in. They call it:

bò-sàná ***lángɔ̀***
14-play 5.camp
'playing camp'

Games include constructing huts, making a fire, cooking, and imitating breastfeeding, they also performed *mòsámbò*. One morning, the adults already left to search for the

food, only me, one grandmother and a group of children stayed in the camp. The oldest boy in the group performed a short *mòsámbò* about children playing too loud, carefully imitating the speech style. He was shouting, made serious facial expressions, and walked hectically around the camp. Other children were sitting, holding their "babies", commenting in a whisper to each other their opinion about his *mòsámbò*, attempting to appear serious while hiding the urge to laugh. While I have I have observed children to criticise adults openly, and seen them using avoidance and similar to adults' techniques to resolve disagreements within the children's groups, too, I have not seen them speaking *mòsámbò* to adults.

"Types" of Mòsámbò

Mòsámbò is usually spoken by adults, but mostly by elders (*kòmbéti*), twice a day. There are morning and evening *mòsámbò*. The morning speeches are mainly about planning and outlining the work for the day: *"such as reminding the young boys to go for palm-nuts or honey, or encouraging the women to collect wild yams at such and such a place that a hunter saw."* (Lewis 2002: 79). From this point on I will refer to *mòsámbò* that focus on organising camp activities as *organising mòsámbò*. The main objective of the evening speeches is to: *"advise, criticise and organise the camp."* (ibid). I will refer to these kinds of speeches as *normative mòsámbò.*

Firstly, I will discuss *organising mòsámbò.* As I have mentioned above, this kind of speaking occurs mainly in the mornings, but not exclusively. While the evening speaking is carefully constructed, morning *organising mòsámbò* is to remind the issues from the evening – so it does not have to be prepared, just repeated. The preparation of an evening *organising mòsámbò* is carried out by men.

During the evening, women are usually busy with processing and cooking gathered foods. Men usually group at their special sitting area (*mbáŋdʒò*). Normally, there is a lot to discuss because, unlike women, men often spend their days separated from each other. Apart from recounting news and stories of that day, their role is to prepare *organising mòsámbò.* They sit close to each and discuss the content of the speaking.

Nonetheless, *mòsámbò* has to express: *"what most people think or want to do anyway."* (Lewis 2014a: 232). Thus, within the men's group, there is usually one who volunteers

doing "eavesdropping" of ongoing conversations in the camp. This man walks around the camp to hear people's opinions and suggestions for the following day's work. Women also come close to the men and address a nearby woman so that the men at the *mbáŋdʒò* hear what she says.

There is a convention to express these ideas indirectly. For example, people do *not* say anything like: *"I think this should be spoken about in tonight's mòsámbò."* They simply continue in their conversations, but they do so more loudly and repeat the main ideas. For example, an adult woman came from her fishing trip and saw yams of certain kind. She is convinced that they should be dug out. Thus, she talks about it loudly until she would see the "eavesdropping man" nod and return to the *mbáŋdʒò*. Men would incorporate the suggestion about digging these yams in the repertoire of the speaking. Then the man would continue overhearing other conversations to make sure that each suggestion is represented.

Interestingly, this process of *mòsámbò* construction was observed also by Martin Gusinde who carried out research with Belgian Congo Pygmies – the Twa – in 1930s. He refers to the men's *mbáŋdʒò* planning as "council of elders":

> "Together with this "leader," some older men take care of the general affairs and regulations of the band. Thus one might speak of a "Council of Elders", but it should be remembered that it is by no means a legalized or authoritative machinery. *The old "leader" discusses with the "council" many proposals which he afterwards places before the entire band."* (Gusinde 1955: 24).

Combettes & Tomassone's (1978) work primarily concerns the analysis of grammar and lexicon of the "Biaka" from Central African localities of Bokoka, Lombo, and Bokoma. However, one of their source texts/transcriptions of Biaka speech (ibid: 108-114) seems to show similarities with *organisational mòsámbò*. The transcription suggests that there is one speaker addressing a group. Content-wise, the speaker suggests how can Biaka cooperate in net hunting for "Bangando" Bilo, and outlines the work coordination for tomorrow's hunt. The speaker addresses the groups of people: "children", "non-married youth", "group of young girls" "women", "elders", and suggests specific roles to each group while net-hunting.

Kimura (1990: 12) also mentions organisational function of *bonango.* The author, however, remarks that the instructions for work organisation are already known. Thus, the speech becomes a formal announcement of already shared information. It is very likely that to a certain extend this takes place in case of *organising mòsámbò* as well. Given the fact that women spend most of their days separated from their husbands, this "eavesdropping" could be understood as a formalised communication between gender groups, and with the children of the camp. Elder children can also share, for example, way-finding information on already ripened fruit, since they spend much of their time independently from adults, playing and exploring in the forest. Thus, this system of listening to plan *mòsámbò* allows men's, women's, and children's opinions to be shared at once.

If *organising mòsámbò* truly represents what all people suggested, there is usually no need for another *mòsámbò* of this kind. If the speaker did not mention somebody's suggestion, this person might follow up with his/her speaking. When this is all over, people do not tend to return to the issues of the speech. The work possibilities for the following day are clear. And so, there are no more issues to be discussed.

Importantly, these are just working *possibilities*. Speakers cannot coerce others to do certain tasks. Individuals choose which activity they want to engage in. As described by Lewis: *"*[…] *it is often difficult to understand how anything gets done. Yet somehow, day after day, the camp spontaneously organizes itself to find sufficient food without an elder or leader directing people to act. People organize themselves sensitively in relation to what others announce they are doing, so that their actions are complementary."* (Lewis 2013: 53). Therefore*, organising mòsámbò* is very important in terms of sharing ecological knowledge and managing the group's cooperation and coordination in economic production.

Another particular type of *mòsámbò* are *individual complaints.* Specific to this sort of *mòsámbò* is repetition of the main message the speaker wants to deliver. For example, one elderly woman was very upset about a gossip regarding sexual behaviour of her daughter who recently gave birth to a baby girl. While remaining in a relationship with the father of her baby, she began a new relationship with another man. As a consequence, people guessed who the father is and how dangerous this can be for her

and the child – making her *èkóndʒì* (a woman with ruined *ekila,* see Lewis 2008). The mother's speaking was based on the repetition of the same sentence:

Díká	***ɸòɸ-á***	***nà***	***mò-nà***	***w-ámù!***
stop.IMP	talk-PRS	about	1-child	1-1SG.POSS

'Stop talking about my child!'

The woman shouted this phrase for about three hours, until physical exhaustion. This shows how *mòsámbò* helps to: *"make a point and get the annoyance off the speaker's chest."* (Lewis 2014a: 233). Lorna Marshall likened this sort of !Kung's *talk* as to being present in someone else's dream:

> "It occurs in varying degrees of intensity. It is a repeating of something over and over and over again. For instance, whether it is actually so or not, someone may be reiterating that he has no food or that no one has given him food. The remarks are made in the presence of other individuals, but the other individuals do not respond in the manner of a discussion or conversation. In an extreme instance we saw a woman visitor go into a kind of semi-trance and say over and over for perhaps half an hour or so in ≠Toma's presence that he had not given her as much meat as was her due. It was not said like an accusation. It was said as though he were not there. I had the eerie feeling that I was present in someone else's dream. ≠Toma did not argue or oppose her. He continued doing whatever he was doing and let her go on." (Marshall 1961: 235).

I spoke *mòsámbò* several times throughout my fieldwork. Shouting so loud truly made me feel better, disregarding of whether the problem was solved. Similarly, the *Talk*: *"differs from a conversation or an arranged, purpose-ful discussion. It flares spontaneously, I believe from stress, when something is going on in which people are seriously concerned and in disagreement."* (Marshall 1997: 233).

Similar function of *mòsámbò* was also emphasised by *Bémbà Ònòlé* – this man was renown for his passion in speaking *mòsámbò* in our neighbourhood. Once I asked him, why does he speak *mòsámbò* so often:

Mò-ndɔ́	***mú***	***à-támbòlɑ́***	***mò***	***àŋgámù***	***mò-súkú*** –

3-issue DEM 3SG-walk.PRS in 1SG.POSS 3-head

àmɛ́ tí dóŋgí támbí!
1SG NEG 5.sleep NEG
'When the issue walks in my head -— I cannot sleep!'

Àmɛ́ sàŋgàŋà ó ɸàdíkò.
1SG stare.PRS at 9.sky
'I stare at the sky.

Bó àmɛ́ ɸɔ́ɸá mò-sámbò.
so 1SG talk.PRS 3-public.speaking
'So I speak mòsámbò.'

The following type of *mòsámbò* that I am going to discuss could be called "scheming". It serves to organise the group in respect to their strategies with out-group(s). For example, it can discuss strategies to obtain goods from Bilo or anthropologist like me; taking crops from their gardens; planning how to escape from eco-guards; or even how to take palm wine from a "bad" man from another neighbourhood. In other words, this sort of *scheming mòsámbò* can outline strategies for members of the in-group (people from "our" camp) in how to act with members of out-group (e.g. people from other camp, neighbourhood or village, Bilo, visitors). *Scheming mòsámbò* emerges in a different way. While *organising mòsámbò* is based on "eavesdropping", building this sort of speech stems from open conversations and debates in the camp. In this sense, *mòsámbò* reminds *bonango* – it summarises already known information – results of the group's agreed-upon strategies.

I have explained the nature of *organising* and *scheming mòsámbò* and how it is constructed. Now I will introduce *normative mòsámbò.* As I have mentioned above, individual speaking is expected to express public opinion: *"what most people think or want to do anyway."* (Lewis 2014a: 232). This also counts for *normative mòsámbò*. Unlike *organising mòsámbò* where people discuss what they *want/don't want* to do*,* a *normative* speaking is usually elicited through norm transgression, and discusses what people *should/shouldn't* do. In this sense, the speaking could be understood as an explicit normative commentary.

Typically, people use means of *normative mòsámbò* to complain about selfishness, dishonesty, laziness in forest or garden activities, lack of support in hardship, cheating, alcoholism, and violence in general. This kind of *mòsámbò* can also communicate to others that one is desperate; that one cannot find help; that one is not considered or appreciated; or that one works and others only take.

Plate 1 After *mòsámbò*

Pre-dawn individual complaints and suggestions for work has already been shared. This plate illustrates how people separate from each other to do complementary but different tasks in the morning.

Bɔ̀bílà (holding a machete) goes to cut palm nuts. My interpreter (married to *Mbúmà's* daughter; wearing a yellow T-shirt) is going to fix the roof of the house (see the pile of raffia next to him).

Sɔ̀ngɔ̀ (middle; green T-shirt) and and her sister *Dʒàbà* (on the right) are getting ready. *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* and *Mbúmà* (currently inside the house) go to the forest. *Dʒàbà* stays to take care of the children and prepare cassava leaves meal (see the pile of leaves on the ground next to *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀*).

Plate 1 After *mòsámbò* (continued)

Father and husband *Bòkáká* and his family share breakfast – unripe plantains. As can be seen in the picture, he is holding a bark of tree (it is put to palm wine). *Bòkáká* and some other men are leaving to collect their palm wine.

Adolescent girl *Èmílí* is preparing palm oil for breakfast.

Plate 1 After *mòsámbò* (continued)

Widow *Èkáŋgó* stays in the village to finish weaving her mat. *Ndúmbà* (on the left) also stays to work on a *mòndànd̀à* basket for "her" Milo.

Djoubé and *Bòkátá* are examining the axe – they will join *Bɔ̀bílà* in harvesting oil palm nuts.

Plate 1 After *mòsámbò* (continued)

Àɸélà and newborn *Daša* rest in the shade of the house.

Within an hour, the village is practically empty.

While the normative speaking should still represent what the group in general considers as "bad" or "good", it is often spoken by an individual who is personally affected by other's negative actions – the norm was transgressed, and the individual is upset about this transgression. If the transgression occurred during the day, the speaker's agitation accumulates until the evening. Talking loudly to himself or herself, murmuring, and ruminating often characterise this kind of speech. But it is not *mòsámbò* yet, because it is not following the standard formal characteristics of the speech, as discussed above. In a sense, it could be understood as a preparation for the speaking. Eventually, this can result in furious shouting in the evening.

The mode of expression in the normative speech is in general terms, such as: *"people who do this sort of thing are bad."* (Lewis 2002: 77). In addition, the speaker often creates scenarios as if s/he encountered this person and recounts their hypothetical conversations. Despite of being the victim, the speaker must avoid mentioning names. In this sense, *mòsámbò* avoids accusation (Similar to !Kung and their way of complaining about others; Shostak 2002: 110). Mentioning names could potentially provoke aggressive reactions and it did, in my observation. Also, Haneul Jang reported that once she spoke a *mòsámbò* herself, but she mentioned names. As a consequence, people felt offended and were very upset with her. However, this rule applies to all situations when one talks about the other negatively (e.g. gossip) – names should not be mentioned.

Name-avoidance strategy is also consistent with the Efe men evening conversations. In cases of sharing "dogmas" or opinions, "preaching" is expressed in "semantically unilateral communication" (Sawada 1987: 95). In different types of *mòsámbò,* however, names are sometimes mentioned, but it is generally understood, as these speeches are non-judgemental. Therefore, there are no reasons to provoke aggression.

By communicating publicly with the rest of the group, people raise problems, which need attention. Often, the problems are considered to be resolved simply by talking about them. By this I mean that – unless very serious issue happens – people do not demand apology or compensation. Or they demand it, but after the speaking they do not coerce for such actions. Especially apology is very rare and people rather see it as a "thing of Bilo". If it occurs, it is often ridiculed. Apologies that I witnessed remind me

of *Cephu* and his pathetic, dramatic, and self-pitying apology, described in Turnbull's *The Forest People* (1961: 107).

However, *normative mòsámbò* can also result in disputes, fights. Occasionally, group physical fights (*ŋgòkú*). These fights are particularly dangerous, because everyone's active participation is required. In my observation, issues of sorcery – suspicions of someone's deliberate attempt to harm somebody else – were the most common reasons for the massive group fights, especially when alcohol was involved.

Besides the complaining, organising, scheming, and norm-enforcing role, *mòsámbò* also serves to celebrate (*celebratory mòsámbò*). Though not as frequent, these kinds of speeches encourage bonding, and are motivating. The speaker refers to the positive outcomes of successful cooperation of the group; celebrates an abundance of food; or, for example, comments on joy and happiness in general.

Celebratory mòsámbò has pro-social function. These positive commentaries are addressed to a group as a whole and encourage the individuals in continuing doing the right things. Individual achievements are never mentioned in these speeches, but speaker might refer to smaller groups: e.g. the group of women, the group of children, the group of elders. After the speech, listeners often express their excitement and agreement by exclaiming:

è-ssέŋgò ***y-íké!***
7-joy 7-a.lot
'A lot of joy!'

"Èssέŋgò" means "joy", it is to express agreement, contentment, and is considered also as "good". Mbendjele public speaking therefore aims not just to call attention to problematic issues. It also encourages proper behaviour by celebrating or emphasizing the positive outcomes this has for the community.

On these occasions, there are often several speeches spoken one after another. The speakers just repeat the same issues as the previous ones. Often, it almost feels as if *conveying* the message about celebration of the good and the right actions is not the crucial motivation of the speakers. Instead, *sharing* this celebration through means of *mòsámbò* takes place. By this I mean that both the speaker and the audience get into a

state when repeated exchanges of exclaims of joy and agreement become a sort of playful exchange and no one wants to stop it. All parties involved enjoy continuing celebrating *through mòsámbò* even though the message was already delivered.

Given the nature of *celebratory mòsámbò,* it typically results in peaceful, cooperative, and enchanting activities of the group. For example, recounting fables (*gànɔ̀*), singing, dancing, joking. However, this is not a rule. According to my informants, the joy does not have to be manifested in coordinated actions of the whole group. Just a simple continuation of tense-less, peaceful, and joyful atmosphere with no "special program" is also common. Mbendjele refer to it by the term *pwɛ̀tɛ́* and this word is also associated with the peacefulness and "coolness" of the forest, in general.

Lastly, there is an *alarming mòsámbò.* The function of this kind of speaking is solely to inform others about important news of potential danger. *Alarming mòsámbò* often starts by very loud calls to draw attention of others. For example, by shouting a very long:

Ùùóóóóóóɔ́!*
sensation.of.danger
'Danger!'
*see also Lewis (2009: 241).

It can even incorporate drumming, using a horn, or any other instrument/tool with which the speaker can produce intensive sounds. This loudness is necessary mainly in the context of the village. In the forest camp, there is usually no need for such noise, unless people are dispersed in the forest.

The content of this speech is to warn others about potential danger. Most commonly, about an upcoming visit of Congolese officials (policemen, gendarmes, or eco-guards). Based on past discriminative experiences, Mbendjele fear them. Consequently, it is important to deliver such news quickly so the people can take action. This affects the form of the speaking as well. Typically, it is based on repetition of a very short but informative phrases. For example:

Pòlísí	***à***	***yá***	***(è)lɔ́!***
police[FR:police]	3SG	come.PRS	today

'Police are coming!'

Bá-tò ***bà-bé*** ***bà-yá!***
2-person 2-bad 3PL-come.PRS
'Bad people are coming!'

***

Table 17 summarises characteristics of purposes that *mòsámbò* can be employed for. Importantly, *mòsámbò* events can comprise of wide range of topics and fulfil multiple purposes at once. Thus, the *mòsámbò* "typology", as presented here, should bot be seen as some sort of "rigid" classification. The ethnographic example described in Plate 2. The *mòsámbò* event described in Plate 2 illustrates how criticizing, scheming, and celebrating can occur during a single event.

As I have already mentioned in this thesis, even though *mòsámbò* can concern a wide range of subjects, and serves a range of important purposes in the smooth running of collective life, it is distinguished from other forms of speech by the protocols used when marking the speech as *mòsámbò*. This reflects what Lewis remarked, Mbendjele:

> "identify performance styles rather than vocabulary; speech protocols […] such as the mosambo (public speaking) rather than grammatical form […] It is not what words people are singing but the polyphonic yodelling singing style they use, not which dances they dance or which spirits they call but the ritual structures they follow when doing so, not the language they speak but how it is spoken. The perception of what it means to be BaYaka is based on an aesthetic quality in which structure or 'style' matters more than content." (Lewis 2014b: 89).

Table 17 Goals and characteristics of *mòsámbò*

Type	**Characteristics**	**Goal(s)**
Individual Complaining	Usually occurs early – pre-dawn complaints (Lewis 2014b: 77). The speaker vent his/her anger about something unjust that occurred to him/her, as a consequence of others' actions.	Concerns the speaker – the individual, not a group. Seeking catharsis.
Organising	Non-judgmental, rather calm, suggestive, enumerating possibilities.	Economic and social organisation of the group.
Scheming	A summary of decision that the group agreed on through open negotiations and debates.	Strategies for over-coming problems with Bilo, strangers, or others.
Normative	Problems, complains, criticisms, judgements, warnings on consequences of wrong actions.	Conflict resolution, promoting social norms and values, negative feedback. Concerns well-being of the group.
Celebrating	Playful, joyful expressions and evaluations of the good and the right actions.	Promoting pro-social behaviours by giving positive feedback.
Alarming	Loud, extremely repetitive, use of other sounds to call attention.	Communicating news.

Figure 23 Conflict-resolution tree

Mòsámbò is one of many possible ways to resolve conflicts. *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* demonstrates a typically BaYaka method to resolve conflicts: all one needs to do is to dance on this tree called *gùdóbé*. After you scrub the bark and boil it in water. You share the drink with others and any problems will be gone.

Plate 2 *Mòsámbò* — the issue of Milo and her "stolen" cassava

An early morning started as usual with the *organising mòsámbò* speech. Nothing negative happened these days, so this speech was more focused on suggesting what should be done during the day. This day, however, the speech was interrupted and I could hear murmuring by people in a weird whispering tone. I decided to leave the tent and look out for myself. In the distance, I saw a Milo woman shouting and entering into the Mbendjele houses.

The woman and her children collected all the things that were valuable for the Mbendjele: mats, cooking pots and utensils, clothing, knives, machetes, and axes. She was wildly throwing all the objects outside the house, while cursing persistently. Her children collected the objects into a large piece of cloth and baskets and carried it to the next house where the woman entered and repeated the same. I asked people who were standing by what has happening. They explained that someone stole most of that woman's cassava from her fields and that she was upset and was going to take everything from them. Because the Milo woman didn't know who stole her cassava, she practically accused everyone. The Mbendjele were just standing there, speechless.

Plate 2 *Mòsámbò* — the issue of Milo and her "stolen" cassava (continued)

.

When the woman finished raiding all the houses, she and her children left with everything. Afterward, the whole Mbendjele neighbourhood gathered in the middle, large open space of the our neighbourhood. There was a group of women sitting on one side and a group of men sitting on the other.

Bémbà Ònòlé started his speech. At first, he was criticising people for taking too much cassava, instead of taking bit-by-bit, without Milo's realising. He was gesturing wildly and paced up and down between the two groups.

Plate 2 *Mòsámbò* — the issue of Milo and her "stolen" cassava (continued)

Everyone – including children – was paying attention and listened, piercing the *Bémbà's* speech, with exclaims of agreement:

Bóná!	***Vré***	***mò-ndɔ́!***	***Yɛ́***	***té***	***bìɛ́n***	***té!***
like.that	real[FR:vrais]	3-issue	3SG	NEG	good[FR:bien]	NEG
'Like that!'	'True!'		'It's not good!'			

Then the speaker suggested a proposal on behalf of men – they wanted me to pay the woman with money. However, the women were against the proposed solution — they said that I did not have enough money to solve this problem. They proposed to kill an elephant instead. They argued that they would give part of it to the upset Milo and that people didn't have meat for a long time anyway. It would solve the issue with the Milo woman and everyone would get their share as well.

Plate 2 *Mòsámbò* — the issue of Milo and her "stolen" cassava (continued)

The men were quite reluctant at the beginning, but eventually agreed to kill the elephant.

Then another man – his name is also *Bémbà* – stood up and repeated that the killing of elephant will truly resolve the issue, and praised everyone for participation and people's ability to come up with a solution without making disorder or noise. He did not mention that it was the women's idea. He emphasised the cooperation of everyone. His speech was brief and at the end he exclaimed:

- *Do you listen?*
- *Yes!*
- *Do you listen?*
- *Yes!*
- *Then, hit your hands!*
- *Ééé͡,!*

Few of the men, went to visit the Milo woman and soon after, all the objects were returned. Whether they killed the elephant I never found out. Some men left, some families with children went to the forest, too, but I have never heard about this issue again.

Èlíɲìó – Bilo Public Discussion Forum

Loudness as its characteristic feature and usage of Bilo-type insults in *mòsámbò* may suggest that *mòsámbò* is a Bilo tradition. However, Bilo did not practice *mòsámbò*. To share information or news and to discuss matters that require attention, to complain, criticize or praise, they called for a special gathering called *èlíɲìó*.

In contrast with *mòsámbò*, *èlíɲìó* is planned. In Djoubé, there were regular *èlíɲìó* on Sunday mornings. If something needed an immediate attention, the schedule of an upcoming gathering was announced beforehand. Typically, chief of the village appointed Bilo adolescent(s) to spread information on *èlíɲìó's* whereabouts. Before obtaining a megaphone in January 2014, these men announced *èlíɲìó* by walking through the village and shouting out loud.

Each Djoubé's neighbourhood had its own meeting area where *èlíɲìó* takes place. In cases of issues concerning the whole village, *èlíɲìó* took place in the chief's courtyard. *Èlíɲìó* also required a preparation of the physical space. The place was swept, and chairs and benches were specifically arranged. There was a hierarchy of seats' arrangements – the chief had always a special place.

While in *mòsámbò* speaker can engage with others directly and whenever s/he wants, in the case of *èlíɲìó*, one has to wait till Sunday or visit the chief and request a special *èlíɲìó*. The chief decides if the matter needs to be discussed publically or not as well as at what time and where this meeting should take place.

An Mbendjele *mòkóndʒì* (a representative from the Mbendjele community, appointed by chief) was called for presence. The responsibility of the *mòkóndʒì* was to share the information about the meeting to the rest of the Mbendjele from Djoubé – often in a form of *mòsámbò*.

Typically, *èlíɲìó* starts by the chief's opening speech where he presents and describes the matters that will be discussed throughout the gathering. Then, he appoints who is going to speak next. If someone wants to add something, they need to raise their hand to show the moderator that they wish to speak next. When the gathering is over, people drink palm wine or a different type of alcohol to close the issues amicably.

While loudness of *mòsámbò* is its stylistic feature, shouting in *èlíɲìó* was simply an individual's way of expression (of e.g. anger). Those who spoke loudly were asked to calm down. While in *mòsámbò*, names of people should never be mentioned, in the case of *èlíɲìó,* complaints and criticism are addressed to the individuals directly. I also never witnessed the speakers to keep repeating the main messages of the discussions.

Table 18 Examples of *èlíɲìó* discussions

Among Bilo
• Discussions on sales of farming products – e.g. about prices, places or people to sell the goods; transport & logistics. • Resolution of problems – illnesses, misfortunate events, mistreatments, unfairness – suspicions and accusations of sorcery; arrangements for Bilo healers (so-called *feticheurs*). • Upcoming visits of Congolese officials – debates on what information to share or hide. • Planning village events – commemoration ceremonies and other rituals (e.g. birth, purification rituals, ceremonies to secure good hunting outcomes).
Bilo to Mbendjele
• Complaints & criticisms – e.g. theft, Mbendjele children's misbehaviours (e.g. chopping cocoa trees, absence in ORA schools, conflicts between Mbendjele and Bilo children), violence on the cause of alcohol consumption. • Deals on soliciting debts – scheduling and arranging Mbendjele labour for Bilo. • Requesting labour of larger crowd – e.g. cleaning public spaces, harvesting large amounts of oil palm fruits, hunting and gathering larger amounts of food for ceremonies.

Table 19 *Mòsámbò* and *èlíɲìó* compared

Mòsámbò	***Èlíɲìó***
Egalitarian:	**Hierarchical:**
Spontaneous.	Planned.
Everyone can do.	Must be approved and organised by the chief.
No seating requirements – everyone can sit or stand wherever and however s/he wants.	Special seating arrangements – appointed by the village chief or by other person appointed by the chief.
Structured according to the speaker's liking.	Moderated – there is a specific person deciding about who speaks when and for how long.
Style	
Loudness – a specific stylistic feature.	Loudness – in the cases of anger or conflict, or individual expression.
Not mentioning names to avoid accusations.	Mentioning names, even open confrontations and accusations.
Repetition of the main message.	Repetition of the main message not a required stylistic form.

Mòsámbò About and for Children

Based on the above-described characteristics of *mòsámbò*, I assume that the reader is familiar with what *mòsámbò* is and how it is utilised. In this section I will address in what ways my Mbendjele informants employed *mòsámbò* to promote children's, adolescents', and young adults' maturity. I will focus on those speeches that were addressing issues of children's behaviour and describe the content of these *mòsámbò.*

I observed 238 *mòsámbò* speakings. After listening to the speech, I verified my understanding of the content with the speaker and/or other individuals present. The frequencies of particular issues are represented in Table 20. Some cases were particularly difficult to organise just within one category, because an individual speaking can raise several concerns at the same time. My systematisation was based on what the speakers stressed as most important, or repeated most frequently in the speech. The biggest number of *mòsámbò* about children was related to the organisation of work throughout day. However, my aim is to focus on the "problematic" issues (*normative mòsámbò*), because these examples speak about the most sensitive problems children should learn about.

As I will show, *mòsámbò* serves to reinforce the Mbendjele norms through discussing real instances of misbehaviour of the individual or a group. However, listed frequencies are rather to show the character of the data than pointing out that certain topics are of greater importance or not. My focus here is to present deeper picture of Mbendjele adults' issues with their children and focus rather on the qualitative side of the *mòsámbò* speeches.

Data collection depended to certain extent on my language proficiency as well. However, with the help of interpreter I was able to understand the core of the story and the main messages of the speaking. I do not employ linguistic analysis here; the examples of the speakers' phrases are excerpts from my research diaries and function as illustrative information.

Table 20 *Mòsámbò* discussing problems with children

The speaker may discuss one issue, or multiple issues in his/her *mòsámbò*. In the analysis I include each *mòsámbò* speaking, which at least mentioned the issue with children. Only 18% (N=42) of cases speaker discussed the children issues only. In most *mòsámbò* (82%; N=196) adults spoke about multiple issues. 36% (N=86) of speakings discuss work organisation.

Issue	**N**
Organisation of work	86
Repeated disrespect, showing off, and greediness	49
Making a disorder	38
Lack of participation in economic production	29
Bilo-Mbendjele conflicts	23
Inappropriate sexual behaviour	13
Total	**238**

In the following passage I will present concrete ethnographic examples to each of the discussed issue.

Encouragements to do as requested, showing off and failures to share

Children are expected to contribute to household activities when requested. Children are asked to fetch water and firewood, hand and bring the tools, help with carrying babies, leave a better seat, or deliver a message on behalf of the elder, as their contribution to smooth camp life. Children understand that they should help others, but the valuation of their personal autonomy allows them to refuse these sorts of simple demands to a certain point. All members of the group are expected to contribute to the life of the camp as best they can, and this applies to children as much as anyone else. Unless children refuse to help out too frequently, this sort of behaviour is accepted.

People who frequently behave with greediness and show off, Mbendjele call *"bòtíyà".* Elders reflect in the *mòsámbò* only cases of what is considered as a serious disrespect, or as a result of accumulation of these sorts of behaviours. Here is one ethnographic example about disrespecting and dandy boy:

Pokola is a logging town[13] with a big food market and eight Mbendjele neighbourhoods. It is almost a mythical place, full of 'white' people, huge trucks (*kàmìyónì*) and lots of foods. It was a Christmas time and I left to Pokola to rest for a while and to buy the supplies. *Bémbà* (14) and my interpreter *Mbámù* (22) went with me. *Mbámù* could see his family and show *Bémbà* around, while I did my shopping and arranged the logistics for our trip back to Djoubé.

However, when we got back to Djoubé, *Bémbà* changed his attitude in behaviour to people from Djoubé. After we returned, he responded to others rudely, refused to help out, looked for "too many" girlfriends, and sang Lingala pop songs[14], and ignored simple demands of the elders. For example, *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* asked him to fetch firewood, because he wanted to forge his knife. *Bémbà* left, but did not come back[15]. *Dʒèmɛ́nì* asked him to sharpen the knife while she was cutting *kɔ̀kɔ̀* (*Gnetum*) leaves, he refused. It continued for the next week, till *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* was so annoyed that he did *mòsámbò* about it an early evening:

Mò-nà	***à***	***dìɛ́***	***nà***	***bò-tíyà!***
1-child	3SG	be.PRS	with	14-rudeness

'The child is rude!'

À	***tí***	***kùmísà***	***bà-kòmbɛ́tì***	***té!***
3SG-	NEG	Respect.PRS	2-elder	NEG

'Doesn't respect elders!'

Sàkídìɛ́	***yɛ́***	***bó***	***à***	***bɔ̀s-ɛ́***	***yɛ̀kólì!***
bother.PRS	3SG	so.that	3SG	take-SUBJ	learning[FR:école]

'Bother[16] him so he would learn!'

[13] Established by the company *Congolaise Industrielle de Bois (OLAM)* with the population of about 13.000 inhabitants.

[14] Inhabitants of Pokola have access to electric power. Therefore, popular Lingala songs are omnipresent. Mbendjele children like to stay around the shops and bars where this music is played out loud. For more details about the modernisation processes and recent changes of the use of social space, see Oishi and Hayashi (2014).

[15] In my observation, children used several strategies in avoiding helping in little tasks: (1) pretending they did not hear anything; (2) sending some other, younger child to do the task; (3) leaving and not coming back; and (4) rejecting openly: *"I refuse."*

[16] "To bother" here means to frequently demand help from this child – to frequently put him in situations when he needs to help, cooperate, and share.

After this speaking, people continued recounting their negative experiences with *Bémbà.* For the following few weeks, people put a lot more pressure on *Bémbà.* For instance, they criticised his laziness openly, or if he demanded food people continued sharing with him, but remarked that he should start to contribute as well. Younger children mocked him more frequently. Nevertheless, it was very effective – within two weeks *Bémbà* became more helpful and cooperative. Even though people did not praise him for changing his attitude, they stopped "bothering" him to such an extent.

The following example concerns the issue of greed and possessiveness. To contextualise this, I will quote Lewis to characterise how Mbendjele understand material possessions:

> "possessing something is more like a guardianship or caretaker role until someone else needs it. Certain personal possessions, such as a woman's basket, her cooking pots and machete, and a man's bag, his spear, knife and axe, are recognized as belonging to named individuals, often the person who made, found, took, or bought the item. These individuals have priority over others' claims to the item. But when not in use by them, any of these objects will be shared on demand with someone who needs it." (Lewis 2014a: 225).

Here I describe an example concerning a head torch:

> *Bòkúbá* (15) took a head torch of his father and sold it to a Milo in the village called Mombellou, which is about eight kilometres away from Djoubé. For the money, he purchased a packet of cigarettes and rice. His father *Lùné* came back to the camp in the evening and found out that his torch was missing. His friend, elder-*Bɔ̀bílà,* told him what had happened, and *Lùné* got very upset. Head torch is very useful for night hunting trips. His *mòsámbò* was a repetition of several sentences:
>
> | ***Àmɛ́*** | ***kíl-à*** | ***mò-nà*** | ***w-ámù!*** |
> |---|---|---|---|
> | 1SG | refuse-PRS | 1-child | 1-1SG.POSS |
>
> 'I refuse my child!'
>
> | ***Òɸɛ́!*** | ***Dʒóbà!*** | ***Ɲìàmà!*** |
> |---|---|---|
> | 2SG | 1.idiot | 9.animal |
>
> 'You! Idiot! Animal!'

Yá!	***Yá!***	***Àmɛ́***	***bímbòlá***	***òɸɛ́!***
Come.IMP	Come.IMP	1SG	beat.PRS	2SG

'Come! Come! I will beat you!'

Òɸɛ́	***dìɛ́***	***nà***	***bándí***	***b-íké,***	***b-íké,***
2SG	be.PRS	with	14.dandyism	14-a.lot	14-a.lot

'You are too dandy!'

Tools and objects are constantly demanded and shared so they circulate around the community. *Lùné* was so upset because his torch will not return back. Other men were also upset, and publically shared their opinion after the *mòsámbò*. They also used *Lùné's* torch for hunting. *Bòkúbá's* actions had a negative impact on the whole group.

However, this ethnographic example should not be misunderstood as a sign of parental domination or violently sanctioned authority over their children. *Lùné* was simply very upset and vented his anger. Yes, he insulted and even threatened his son with aggression. But he never beat *Bòkúbá.*

This speaking helped to release the pressure in the camp. The torch could not be taken back. Expressing the wrongness of selling it helped to teach *Bòkúbá* a lesson, and also calmed people down. After the *mòsámbò,* the problem was considered resolved and, to my knowledge, it was never mentioned again.

Making a Disorder

While laughter and joy helps opening the camp for food, disorder (*mò-búlú*) closes the camp, and the hunger comes. Noise, disputes, and fights are *mò-búlú*. *Mò-búlú* caused by adult behaviour is often associated with drunkenness (*mò láŋgá*), jealousy, marital relationships and infidelities. Children can produce *mò-búlú* by playing too loudly, screaming or fighting or when someone in the group of children is ostracised or harassed too much. Normally, adults scold the children and instruct them to calm down by saying:

Nà	***mà-nà!***
with	6-slowness

'Slowly!'

In Djoubé, there is a large plantation of cacao trees owned by Bilo. Bilo value and take care of these trees, because they receive a cash income by selling the cacao seeds. Once, a group of Mbendjele children was playing in those trees. Firstly, they just climbed up and sang while sitting on the highest branches. But *Dɔ̀kɔ̀dí (8)* had an idea to take a machete and began cutting the trees. Other children excitingly followed him.

Most of the parents were in the forest or in the gardens. The grandmother, who was taking care of them, drank too much palm wine, and fell asleep. By the time she woke up, the children had already cut down several trees:

Díká ***mò-búlú!***
stop.IMP 3-disorder[LG:mobúlú]
'Stop the disorder!'

But the children ran around laughing about the grandmother's inability to catch them:

Mà-lɛ́kú ***m-íké!***
6-alcohol 6-a.lot
'A lot of alcohol!'

Mà-lɛ́kú ***m-íké,*** ***m-íké!***
6-alcohol 6-a.lot 6-a.lot
'A lot, a lot of alcohol!'

The grandmother explained to me that there will be a problem with Bilo, and sent an adolescent girl *Màdɔ́* to deliver a message to her parents. The plan was to hide for some time in the forest, till the problem was less fresh. We packed our stuff and walked to the nearest camp. Later other adults joined us and we walked further. While walking, women and men spoke their complaints loudly about the unnecessary problems caused by the children. We have arrived at one camp, which had been abandoned for a longer time, so everyone began cleaning and preparing the place. Children were very quiet and helped in cleaning automatically, without any demand from others.

In the evening, men were sitting on their *mbáŋdʒò* and talked to each other about the problem. Later, *Màbɔ́tà* stood up and spoke very seriously. Addressing the children:

Bó, ***ɔ́kà!***
so listen.IMP
'So, listen!'

Bá-nà! ***sànà*** ***nà*** ***mà-nà,*** ***nà*** ***mà-nà,*** ***nà*** ***mà-nà!***
2-child play.PRS with 6-slowness with 6-slowness with 6-slowness
'Children! Play slowly, slowly, slowly!'

Búsɛ́ ***tí*** ***ndìngɛ́*** ***bá-nà*** ***lòkólà*** ***B-íló!***
1PL NEG want.SUBJ 2-child like[LG:lokóla] 2-non.Pygmy.African
'We would not want our children to be similar to Bilo!'

Mò-búlú! ***Mò-búlú!*** ***Mò-búlú!***
3-disorder[LG:mobúlu] 3-disorder[LG:mobúlu] 3-disorder[LG:mobúlu]
'Disorder! Disorder! Disorder!'

Mò-búlú ***tí*** ***dìɛ́*** ***bìɛ́n*** ***támbí!*** ***ʒàmé!***
3-disorder[LG:mobúlu] NEG be.PRS good[FR:bien] NEG never[FR:jamais]
'Disorder is not good! Never!'

Kéŋgòlá ***mà-kámbò*** ***nà*** ***búsɛ́!***
look.for.PRS 6-problem[LG:makambu] for 1PL
'Making problems for us!'

After a short break, *Màbɔ́tà* started another *mòsámbò*. This time, he addressed adults:

Mɛ̀lɛ̀sí, ***bà-mámá,*** ***bà-pápá,*** ***nà*** ***bà-tò*** ***b-ésɛ́***
thank.you[FR:merci] 2-mother 2-father and 2-person 2-all

tú.
all[FR:tout]
'Thank you, mothers, fathers, and all the people.'

Búnɛ́ ***ɔ́kà*** ***mò-ndɔ́*** ***bìɛ́n.***
2PL listen.PRS 3-issue well[FR:bien]
'Listen carefully to this issue.'

Bá-nà ***bà*** ***tí*** ***ébá*** ***b-éndà –***
2-child 3PL NEG know.PRS 8-thing

‘Children don't know the things –‘

bà	***tí***	***ébá***	***mè-ndɔ́***	***m-á***	***búsɛ́ –***
3PL	NEG	know.PRS	4-problem	4-POSS	1PL

‘they don't know our problems –’

mè-ndɔ́	***m-àŋgúsú***	***nà***	***B-íló***
4-problem	4-1PL.POSS	with	2-non.Pygmy.African

‘our problems with Bilo.’

Búsɛ́	***ndìngá***	***bìɛ́n***	***è-ssɛ́ŋgò***	***nà***	***bá-nà***	***bàŋgúsú!***
1PL	want.PRS	good[FR:bien]	7-joy	for	2-child	1PL.POSS

‘We want happiness for our children!’

Bà-kàb-ɛ́	***yɛ̀kólì***	***nà***	***bɛ́nɛ́!***
1PL-share-SUBJ	wisdom[FR:école]	with	3PL

‘We should share wisdom with them!’

Àmɛ́	***sùká***	***dèʒà***	***nà***	***mè-ndɔ́***	***m-ɛ́nɛ́***
1SG	finish.PRS	already[FR:déjà]	with	4-issue	4-DEM

‘I am already finished with this issue.’

Children were listening carefully with downcast eyes. After these *mòsámbò*, adults did not comment more on the behaviour of the children. Adults spoke other *mòsámbò* the following days till we returned to the village, but these speeches were about planning the next course of actions of adults in respect to Bilo. Being present and listening to such speeches can play important role for children’s understanding about what impact can their actions have for the group as a whole.

The group of children acknowledged the consequences of their actions. They were quieter, helped in making a camp, and fetched firewood. As some children explained, they are not like Bilo children and they never will. They are Mbendjele children – delicious children:

Búsɛ́	***b-ú —***	***bá-nà***	***Bà-Mbéndʒélɛ́!***
1PL	1PL-DEM	2-child	2-Mbendjele

‘Us, we are Mbendjele children!’

Búsɛ́	***bà-dìɛ́***	***nà***	***mò-ɲɔ̀ŋgɔ̀!***
1PL	1PL-be.PRS	with	3-delicacy

‘We are delicious!’

It was the combination of *mòsámbò* speeches, flight to the forest, complaints, and the conversations of adults on how to approach Bilo that made the children learn about the consequences of their actions. These were sufficient to make children cooperate and to help without being asked to. They learned that their actions can negatively affect the whole group.

Lack of Participation in the Economic Production

While children's participation and contribution in work is more likely to occur and demand in the farming and pastoral societies (Barry et al. 1959; Kramer 2002; Whiting & Whiting 1975), it is during the adolescence when hunter-gatherers begin with and are expected to contribute (Draper & Cashdan 1988). This *mòsámbò* content is addressed mainly to adolescents and young adults who failed the expectation in contribution in subsistence activities.

> Mother sent *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* (21) to collect *kɔ̀kɔ̀* leaves and some mushrooms, which they planned on having for a dinner. *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* obeyed her mother and left, accompanied by her two teenage friends *Èmílí* and *Íngòló*. The girls had a precise plan. Go to Likombo village and on a way back quickly collect some food. An old *kòmbétì* passed away in Likombo and people held *Èdʒéŋgì* there. *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀, Èmílí,* and *Íngòló* wanted to dance, have fun, and to look for boyfriends.
>
> The girls returned back very late, and *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀'s* mother had already heard about her sexy, luring dances and drunken *è-símé* (an Mbendjele-specific duet between two soloists). The mother spoke *mòsámbò* angrily, repeating these messages:

Ɔ́kà	***mò-ndɔ́***	***m-ú***	***bó***	***àmɛ́***	***bèlá***	***mò-súkú!***
listen.IMP	3-issue	3-DEM	that	1SG	hurt.PRS	3-head

'Listen to the issue that gives me headache.'

Mò-ndɔ́	***mà-kí***	***b-á***	***bá-nà***	***b-àŋgúsú!***
3-issue	6-laziness	2-POSS	2-child	2-1PL.POSS

'The issue of our children's laziness!'

Bá-nà	***bàŋgúsú***	***bà-dìɛ́***	***nà***	***mà-kí!***

2-child 1PL.POSS 3PL-be.PRS with 6-laziness
'Our children are lazy!'

Bɛ́nɛ́ bà-dìɛ́ tò mè-síkí!
3PL 3PL-be.PRS just 4-sitting
'They only sit around!'

Bà-dìká búsɛ́ nà ʤàlà!
3PL-leave.PRS 1PL with 5.hunger
'They leave us with hunger!'

Díká bwàŋìà!
stop.IMP 9.lie
'Stop lying!'

À dìɛ́ nà mà-wà!
3SG be.PRS with 6-sadness
'It's sad!'

Sùká àŋgámù nà w-ɛ́nɛ́!
finish.PRS 1SG.POSS about 3-DEM
'Concerning this issue — my speech is over!'

The following day *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* and her friends left to the forest very early and came back with a full basket of different foods. *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀'s* mother was very satisfied and grabbed the biggest share. No one praised the girls, but no one mentioned the incident either. The problem was resolved and never mentioned again.

Mbendjele-Bilo conflicts

Mòsámbò discussing Mbendjele-Bilo conflicts concerned two main issues: the consequences of "stealing" from Bilo; and conflicts between children. While stealing actions usually take place while individual children engage in labour for adult Bilo, Mbendjele-Bilo children conflicts usually arise in groups, away from adults. I will provide one example to each of the issues.

Consequences of 'Stealing' from Bilo

Conflicts related to theft between hunter-gatherers and the farmers are well-known in the anthropological literature (Grinker 1994; Headland et al. 1989; Ikeya et al. 2009;

Lalouel 1950; Lewis 2002; Ngima Mawoung 2001; Schebesta 1933; Spielmann & Eder 1994; Takeuchi 2005; Colin Turnbull 1965; Turnbull 1960: 38, 39).

Mbendjele from Djoubé use the Lingala term *"mò-yíbì"* to refer to the actions defined by Bilo as "stealing". Despite using the same term, the notion of theft from an Mbendjele point of view does not have the same cultural meaning as it does for the Bilo. This is due to the different economic systems of these groups. Mbendjele immediate-return economics emphasises that everyone has the right to demand anything they need from others in possession of the item. This makes stealing unnecessary. If goods and foods are not defined as private property, then how can they be stolen?

On the other hand, "taking" from Bilo could be explained as simply as Koichi Kitanishi stated in regards of the Baka in Cameroon: *"The Pygmies frequently obtain (or "steal") crops from farmers without permission. Farmers think this act is clear theft. But the Pygmies do not think so because they helped in the farm work, and provided other kinds of labor or forest products to the farmers."* (Kitanishi 2003: 156).

The following example describes a *mòsámbò* speaking addressing stealing/taking acts of children:

> *Dʒàmbàndó* (15) was asked by a Bilo chief[17] to peel the leaves off a pile of heads of corn. While the Bilo was setting up his fishing nets upstream on the river, *Dʒàmbàndó* took 5000CFA (= £6.6) from the chief's house. The following day *Dʒàmbàndó* was wearing new and shiny T-shirt, which he bought in the local boutique. The Bilo chief found out that the money was missing and looked for *Dʒàmbàndó*. However, he was already hiding in the forest.
>
> His parents were on a hunting trip and came back the following day. The Bilo chief and his wife had received the message that they were back and visited the parents. The Bilo's wife was very upset, shouting how *BaMbenga* are just like animals, undermined their parenting skills, and hit the father

[17] To clarify, at that time, there was no official village chief in Djoubé. The last chief passed away about a year prior to my arrival. The village chief is nominated by divisional officer (*préfet*). The new chief was nominated only during the summer 2014. This man was acting as the chief.

twice in his face. For the following two days, his parents worked on the Bilo's farm. Father made a long *mòsámbò* speech, commenting on the "stupidity" of blatantly taking money. He repeated:

Dʒìɛ́ nà mà-yɛ́lɛ́!
do.IMP with 6-intelligence
'Do it intelligently!'

As this example shows, the speaker did not say "stop stealing from Bilo". Instead of criticising the act itself, the father complained about the consequences of not "taking" surreptitiously from Bilo. Even though Mbendjele use the very same term for "stealing" as Bilo do, the concept of stealing material items can only occur in Mbendjele-Bilo relations. Successful taking from Bilo should be slow-pace, bit-by-bit, and without Bilo realising. The father taught *Dʒàmbàndó* that if one is incapable doing things properly, it has negative consequences for the whole community.

Children's conflicts

Another *mòsámbò* issue concerning the problems with Bilo were Bilo-Mbendjele children's conflicts. As I have described in the chapter about growing up in an Mbendjele society, Mbendjele and Bilo children are not encouraged to interact. Both Bilo and Mbendjele encourage the transmission of interethnic stereotypes. However, parents are not always successful in preventing Mbendjele-Bilo interactions:

Bilo children from the nearest village of Bondjanda used to attend state school in Djoubé on a daily basis. There were two schools in Djoubé: Congolese state school and an ORA school designed for Mbendjele. The children from Bondjanda attended the Congolese state school. Bondjanda is situated about two kilometres away from Djoubé and children get to school by walking along the forest path or by canoe on the Motaba River. Mostly, the Bilo children took the forest path.

One day, Mbendjele children were playing on this path and saw a group of Bilo children approaching. They began teasing and insulting each other, till it turned into a big group fight (*ŋgòkú*). Bilo children complained about this incident to the school teacher and the village chief. Consequently, Mbendjele parents were called to attend a special meeting with the village

> judge committee, and as a result of their children's "animal behaviour", they were forced to work on the Bilo farms the next day.

There were numerous *mòsámbò* speeches that night. None of the speakers judged the behaviour itself, rather enumerated the negative consequences of such actions. Thus, adults empathized with the behaviour of their children to Bilo, but taught them that this sort of behaviour brings negative consequences to the whole group.

Sexual Behaviour of Children

Anthropological research on hunter-gatherer (Bailey & Aunger 1995; Sugawara 2005; Tanaka 2016), Pygmy hunter-gatherer sexuality (Hewlett & Hewlett 2008; Hewlett & Hewlett 2010), primarily focused on the adult sexual practices and beliefs. However, the authors mention also some aspects of the sexual behaviour of children and adolescents in the Aka society: *"Sexual play is common in childhood* […] *and sexual activity is a frequent and open topic of conversation."* (Hewlett & Hewlett 2010: 122).

Mbendjele, like Aka (Hewlett & Hewlett 2010), Mbuti (Turnbull 1981), and the !Kung (Shostak 1981: 16–17) express openness to sexuality, and the children's sexual games are generally accepted. However, sexually mature adolescents are expected to conform to adult-like "rules" of sexual practices. If these rules are not followed, speakers often reflect on it in their *mòsámbò*. In my observation, these sorts of children's and adolescents' sexual behaviours were discussed: judging youngsters for sleeping around; criticising public instances of sexual behaviour; inappropriate flirting; and sexual relationships with Bilo. To each of these issues I will provide ethnographic examples.

Judging youngsters for sleeping around

Both adolescent girls and boys enjoy quite free sexual life and experimenting. However, this is also limited. The reputation of both genders can be threatened:

> *Pòlákò* (18) stayed in the village with her younger brother *Bémbà* (5), who could not walk. His feet were infected by chiggers (*mà-kándʒà*). Their mother went fishing to the forest with other children and asked *Pòlákò* to be

at home with her brother and prepare *kɔ̀kɔ̀* leaves, which they will eat in the evening with the gathered fish.

Pòlákò stayed nearby the house, but in the early afternoon a group of four boys from nearby village Bondjanda came to collect oil palm nuts in Djoubé. They stopped in front of the house of *Pòlákò* and chatted for a while. Suddenly, they left to the forest and *Pòlákò* followed them few minutes after.

By the time *Pòlákò* left, *Bémbà* was playing with the fire and turned over the cooking pot, spilling water and *kɔ̀kɔ̀* leaves on the ground. *Bémbà* put back the leaves into the pot, added more water and cooked the leaves with the earth. Mother came back and saw that *Pòlákò* left and a group of women, who stayed in the village, came to inform her that *Pòlákò* is with the Mbendjele boys from Bondjanda.

Later on, other women who were returning from a foraging trip stopped to tell her that they have seen boys taking one path and *Pòlákò* took the same path afterwards. Her mother got even more upset, realising there is earth in their food. When *Pòlákò* returned home, mother hit her with a piece of wooden branch while calling her whore. The girl ran away to the forest crying and came back after the sunset. Her father *Bɔ̀bílà* cried loud his *mòsámbò* that night, repeating:

Kómbá,	***ò***	***kìlá***	***(à)mɛ́***	***nà***	***bó?***
1.creator	2SG	refuse.PRS	1SG	for	what

'Kómbá (God), why are you refusing me?'

The following morning, the family left to the forest and came back only after a week.

This ethnographic example matches with the interpretation of Lewis: *"The sexual encounters of teenagers, being not seriously concerned with procreation, do not seem to harm ekila unless too many different partners are involved."* (Lewis 2002: 118).

Criticising public instances of sexual behaviour

Performing any form of public sexual behaviour is perceived as inappropriate. In Mbendjele culture, sexual behaviour is permitted in a private space, such as the forest. Admittedly, certain public sexual behaviours in younger children are tolerated to a certain extend. The situation differs in the case of adolescents:

> *Pòlákó* (18) (the same girl as in the previous example) had a boyfriend from another neighbourhood. One night he came into her house and instead of leaving before the family woke up, he fell asleep. *Pòlákó's* father, *Bɔ̀bílà,* threw him out in a rage and shouted at *Pòlákó.* Afterwards, he walked through the village shouting his *mòsámbò*. He was explaining how he is unhappy, how it is not his fault. He cried, and became gradually upset and shouted insults to the boyfriend of *Pòlákó,* claiming how people from the other neighbourhood are rude. It took several hours. Exhausted, he retired to his house and took a nap.
>
> The environment of the village or the forest camp is considered a public space. If adults engage in sexual act in public or if someone finds them, a typical reaction is to ridicule them. As this example illustrates, in case of adolescent girls, parents may get worried, upset, and ashamed. Their shame (*sóní*) made this family leave the village for two weeks, till the incident got forgotten.

Inappropriate flirting

Aka, like Mbendjele Pygmy adolescents enjoy sexual freedom and flirting: *"A favorite activity during adolescence is travelling to other camps to visit and "check out" the opposite sex. A lot of energy and time goes into flirting and looking for a prospective mate."* (Hewlett 2013: 86). However, there are certain limits to flirting practices. The following example illustrates disrespectful flirting of an adolescent boy to an older, pregnant woman:

> *Bémbà* (14), an orphaned boy adopted by one family from Bangui-Motaba, was walking through the forest with his adoptive parents. They were returning from a honey-collection trip. As they were approaching the village Djoubé, passing through the Bilo gardens, they met one woman called *Díbà*

(28). *Díbà* was on her way to fetch some firewood, and was pregnant at that time. *Bémbà* liked the woman, came closer to her and pinched her cheeks. Parents were firstly quiet and everyone walked to the village as if nothing happened.

However, both the father and the mother began talking about this *"bòtíyà"* (rude behaviour). More people joined and listened, repeating that *Bémbà* is "*bòtíyà",* and that this is *"è-kóndʒì".* The situation seemed to calm down after an hour, but father *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* continued murmuring to himself in his *mò-ŋgúlú* (beehive-shaped leaf hut).

In the evening, when everyone went to sleep, father started his *mòsámbò.* Firstly, lying on his mat, talking quietly, but gradually getting more excited, raising his voice and pacing up and down the camp. Here is an excerpt of the main messages:

Búnɛ́	***ɔ́k-ɛ́***	***mò-ndɔ́***	***w-ámù***	***nà***	***búdì!***
2PL	listen-SUBJ	3-issue	3-1SG.POSS	with	9.hardness

'You should listen to my issue very well!'

Ìl	***fɔ́***	***bó***	***búsɛ́***	***kàb-á***
>	it.is.necessary[FR:il.faut]	so.that	1PL	share-PRS

mà-yɛ́lɛ́	***nà***	***bá-nà***	***b-àŋgúsú!***
6-knowledge	with	2-child	2-1PL.POSS

'It is necessary to teach our children!'

Mò-nà	***à-dìɛ́***	***nà***	***síló!***
1-child	3SG-be.PRS	with	9.orphanhood

'The child is an orphan!'

À-dìɛ́	***tò***	***mò-nà –***	***à***	***tí***	***ébá!***
3SG-be.PRS	just	1-child	3	NEG	know.PRS

'He is just a child – he doesn't understand!'

Yɛ́	***té***	***bìɛ́n***	***té!***
3SG	NEG	good[FR:bien]	NEG

'It's not good!'

Nà	***kútú,***	***búsɛ́***	***kábwòl-á***	***mà-yɛ́lɛ́!***
>	tomorrow	1PL	share-PRS	6-wisdom

'Tomorrow, we'll explain!'

Sùká!	***M-à***	***mò-sìá.***
end.PRS	3-DEM.PROX	3-be.over.PRS

'The end! My speech is over!'

The seriousness of *Bémbà's* disrespect to older, pregnant woman was the danger he inflicted on the health of *Díbà* and her baby – *è-kóndʒì.* Men should not flirt with pregnant women, because it causes problems in childbirth and makes infants "crying too much".

Mistakenly, I expected that the following day adults will teach children about *è-kóndʒì.* However, nothing occurred. So I went to *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* and asked him if he is going to teach children about *è-kóndʒì. Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* seemed to be firstly confused, and then began laughing:

Pámbá!
9.rubbish[LG:pámba]
'Rubbish!'

Mò-ndɔ́	***m-à***	***mò-sìá!***
3-problem	3-DEM.PROX	3-be.over.PRS

'That problem is over!'

Àmɛ́	***dèʒà***	***sápwòlá-ká***	***m-ò***	***mò-sámbò.***
1SG	already[FR:déjà]	explain-PRF	3-in	3-public.speaking

'I have already explained it in mòsámbò.'

Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá's *mòsámbò* was simultaneously an 'wisdom-sharing' act and one of problem-solving. After the *mòsámbò,* this incident was never mentioned again.

Sexual relationships with Bilo

In chapter of the Mbendjele life-cycle*,* I have elaborated the negative attitude of Mbendjele adults to their children's interactions with Bilo. This ethnographic example discusses an incident of an intimate relationship between an Mbendjele adolescent girl and the already married Milo man:

> *Àndʒélé* (19) broke up with her Mbendjele boyfriend and began dating a young, but married Milo man. At the beginnings, he was coming over to *Àndʒélé's* house to share his palm wine with her and her family. By sharing

palm wine with the family members of the young girl a boy signals that he wants to marry her. During the day, *Àndʒɛ́lɛ́* worked on his farm. People began commenting on it, but it was not yet such a serious issue. However, one night, this young man stayed in the house for the whole night with the approval of the parents.

The whole community began to gossip about *Àndʒɛ́lɛ́* and about her parents, as well. People talked about three main issues. Firstly, *Àndʒɛ́lɛ́* was judged as a promiscuous (*nà yàŋgí*), because she was seeking extra food, wine and gifts in exchange for sex. Secondly, *Àndʒɛ́lɛ́* behaved unclean (*mbíndò*), because she shared her *èkìlá* with Milo. On top of it – he was also married. Lastly, parents of *Àndʒɛ́lɛ́* were criticised for quietly accepting this situation; for denying this relationship in public; and for accepting gifts from the Milo.

After three days of intensive gossip, *Àndʒɛ́lɛ́'s* mother got very upset and loudly shouted out her *mòsámbò*:

Mò-nà	***àŋgámù***	***wɔ̀té***	***nà***	***M-íló***
1-child	1SG.POSS	there.is.not	with	1-non.Pygmy.African

'My child is not with Milo!'

Mò-nà	***àŋgámù***	***wɔ̀té***	***nà***	***mò-tòpáì***
1-child	1SG.POSS	there.is.not	with	1-boyfiriend

'My child is not with a boyfriend!'

Mò-nà	***àŋgámù***	***à-dìɛ́***	***bìɛ́n!***
1-child	1SG.POSS	3SG-be.PRS	good[FR:bien]

'My child is good!'

Mò-nà	***àŋgámù***	***à-dìɛ́***	***è-ssɛ́ŋgò!***
1-child	1SG.POSS	3SG-be.PRS	7-joy

'My child is a joy!'

Mò-nà	***àŋgámù***	***à-dìɛ́***	***bìɛ́n,***	***próp!***
1-child	1SG.POSS	3SG-be.PRS	7-joy	proper[FR:propre]

'My child is good and proper!'

Díká	***mò-nà***	***àŋgámù!***
stop.IMP	1-child	1SG.POSS

'Let my child be!'

Díká bwàŋìà!

stop.IMP 9.lie
'Stop lying!'

Tí	***kéŋgòlá***	***mà-kámbò!***	***támbí***
NEG	Look.for.PRS	6-problem[LG:makambu]	NEG

'Stop searching for problems!'

However, other people continued by contributing *mòsámbò*. For example, *Dʒèménì* (45-50) had a daughter of a similar age as *Àndʒélé,* and these two girls were very good friends. *Dʒèménì* warned *Àndʒélé* (without mentioning her name) that she does not want her child to be also like a "prostitute" to those Bilo animals (*bà-ɲìàmà*). *Dʒèménì* was worried about *Àndʒélé's* bad influence on her child.

Though not marriage, nevertheless, some young Mbendjele girls engage in short-term relationships with Bilo. In the above-mentioned example, the young girl and her family enjoyed economic benefits despite the tendencies of parents' refusal to admit this relationship on public. The mother of *Àndʒélé* denied the existence of this relationship. *Dʒèménì,* by pointing to the danger of *Àndʒélé's* influence on her daughter, made a clear and public statement that this sort of relationship is "bad". Doing so, *Dʒèménì* taught younger girls about its badness. While gossip certainly played role in teaching about the wrongness of "being together" with a Milo, the power of the *mòsámbò* is in its *public* expression, where the representations of what the most people think is shared with the whole community.

By commenting on the sexual (mis)behaviours, *mòsámbò* indirectly refers to *èkìlá* prescriptions and proscriptions. This is consistent with the implicit pedagogic action of *èkìlá* discussed by Lewis (2008). Teaching *èkìlá* does not occur though institutions, or specialized individuals. *Mòsámbò* is one of the most public venues for reproducing the knowledge of *èkìlá*-prescribed behaviour – it discusses behaviours which are dangerous and harmful, without the necessity of uttering the word *"èkìlá"*.

Discussion

Mòsámbò concerns the group's interests. Most of the *mòsámbò* examples outlined above, speakers not only judge the misbehaviour itself (if so), but emphasize its further negative consequences for the group. Through *mòsámbò*, speakers constantly remind people that their actions have impact on everyone else. This also explains why, for example, the speaker should be concerned about someone else's daughter and her sexuality. This is enhanced by the belief that people's improper actions cause noise (*mòtɔ́kɔ́*) and that the noise comes with repercussions for the whole group. Namely, noise causes the forest to "close". And as a consequence, people cannot find food and suffer from hunger and diseases. Thus, children's and adolescents' behaviour is a concern of everyone. These beliefs of noise normalise the public nature of child-rearing – or as Draper & Hames (2000: 125) called it in regards to Ju/'Hoansi – an *"open air"* child-rearing.

Mòsámbò primarily concerns the well-being of the group. Bird-David (2005: 96) suggested that learning in hunter-gatherer context – in her case the South Indian Nayaka – is *not* about *"knowing things for their sake."* Instead, learning is embedded within the web of social relations; its goal is to: *"keep these relations going."* (ibid). This accords with the nature of *mòsámbò.* The speaker does not simply say that showing-off is bad, s/he places it within the specific events that just occurred or occurred in near past. *Mòsámbò* does not discuss the norms and values as such. *Mòsámbò* cannot be isolated away from its social context – there are events that precede *mòsámbò,* such as events that trigger the speech and gossiping that surrounds this event, as well as the events that follow the speech. *Mòsámbò* is always situated in a specific social context, and reflects or predicts on the relations with other members of the community.

Taking this "relations" stance into mind, *individual complaining mòsámbò* points to how the relationships were *already* impacted by others' actions according to the speaker's own perception. *Normative mòsámbò* explains how relationships can be threatened by peoples' improper actions, or predicts on what happens if people continue on doing the wrong things. *Organisational mòsámbò* helps in coordinating people in their work to assure well-being of the relations within the group. *Scheming mòsámbò* emboldens the relations, seeing it as an intragroup bonding event, involving plotting against outsiders.

Celebratory mòsámbò publically acknowledges how good the intragroup relations are and encourages its continuity. Lastly, *alarming mòsámbò* protects the intragroup relations – the speaker takes other's wellbeing into mind by sharing news that can be dangerous or negatively impact the (safety of the) group, even though the individual could simply flee.

Mòsámbò is (pro)egalitarian. Lewis (2016: 149) states that teaching in an Mbendjele society occurs without *"titled or specifically recognized individuals."* Some may argue that because *mòsámbò* is often spoken by *mòsámbò*-speaking specialist (*lìpwété*), this sort of "wisdom-sharing"/teaching is an example where employment of specifically recognised individuals takes place. Nonetheless, there are two issues which need to be stated here. Firstly, Mbendjele do not assign any sort of privileges or deference to such specialists. If the status of *lìpwété* would be highly-valued, desired, and would lead to, for example, an increase in wealth or prestige, then it would be likely that in such an assertively egalitarian context, everyone would do it. And as I have stated above, people often ask *lìpwété* to speak on their behalf. Secondly, each individual speaking must represent what most people think – at least in a sense that the speech must represent shared values of what is generally perceived as good or bad, desirable and undesirable, proper and improper. If this does not take place – as for instance in drunken speeches *"mòsámbò mò láŋgá"* – *mòsámbò* is ignored, criticized, mocked or turns into disputes, fights, and even causes frictions within the groups.

Thus, even though *mòsámbò* is spoken by individuals, it must represent the group's interests. The "group" nature of *mòsámbò*, or this special "group-speak" as Lewis (2014a) puts it – can be also seen through its participative nature of audience. Audience here is not passive – audience has a voice. If the audience does not participate sufficiently to the speaker's liking– if people do not interject the speech with sensations of agreement or disagreement – the speaker repeats asking if they were listening, and if they understood what s/he was saying. Without audience, *mòsámbò* would not be *mòsámbò* anymore.

Why children didn't speak? Speaking *mòsámbò* is open to everyone. Lewis, for example, observed youngsters and children to engage in speaking (Lewis 2017, personal communication). To speak *mòsámbò* requires a skill and courage. I did not understand

fully what it takes before I decided to speak one. First of all, it was an agitation about others' actions that triggered this decision in the first place. Thus, I was upset, but at the same time, I had to control my anger, I needed to remain calm enough to articulate my message clearly, without simply shouting, blaming, and accusing people. Further, the speech has its protocol – one has to follow it in order to signal people that something important is going to be shared and to secure everyone's attention. On top of it, one needs to talk loud to be sure that everyone listens. In other words, it's emotionally and energetically a hard task to do. In my personal view, it seemed that there were people who liked to do *mòsámbò* a lot and there were people, who I had never seen doing it. As *Bémbà Ònòlé*, one of my informants and lover of *mòsámbò* stated, he needed to do it in order to be able to fall asleep. Otherwise, the *"problems would keep walking all over his head"*. On the other hand, I have never seen *Mbúmà's* daughter *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́* to speak not even once. Even though this is just a personal view, my own experiences with speaking of *mòsámbò* made me realise why I haven't seen children doing it, or feel more courageous to do it outside children's groups through play – even though they are free to do so. While I have often seen children criticising adults, it was not through means of *mòsámbò* protocol.

What kind(s) of wisdom mòsámbò shares? Besides the reminders that people's actions impact others, *mòsámbò* avoids creating noise, as it happens when gossiping, in open debates, or fights. *Mòsámbò* shows what appropriate coordination and problem-solving of the groups looks like. The ethnographic vignettes above illustrate on how *mòsámbò* is used to judge boastful and greedy people; encourages economic production; and castigates those who do not contribute. It teaches about sharing, gendered social and sexual behaviour, and expected behaviour towards 'others' (such as Bilo).

As can be seen from the ethnographic vignettes, adults were not concerned about children's knowledge as such. I have never heard a *mòsámbò*, where someone would question somebody's skills per se. If we take, for example, the case of *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* and the fact that she left people hungry, even though she remarked that she is going to gather food, and to return and share that food with others; the mother of *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* made an emotional appeal that she did not keep her word and that she did not find enough food, and did not share it with others. The mother was not concerned what *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀*'s gathering skills were like, if she was good gatherer or not, but rather if she participated or not, if she

contributed or not, if she thought about mother's and about the group's well-being or not.

Similarly, the father did not reproach that *Dʒàmbàndó* is unskilled in the theft techniques from Bilo, but its consequences on himself (the father – the speaker), his wife – *Dʒàmbàndó* s mother, and hence on the group. He did not reproach that *Dʒàmbàndó* is unskilled in stealing or undermined his skills. He demanded him to do it intelligently next time, so that people do not have work on Bilo's farms. The frequent content of *mòsámbò* speeches regarding the behaviour of children indicates the issues Mbendjele adults consider to be highly important for children to understand because they share and discuss them so publicly. Moreover, *mòsámbò* shows that responsibilities in rearing children are shared among the adults of the group, because any problem, or issue, which emerges within the group, can have a direct impact on the livelihood of the group and so must be resolved by the group.

Styles of mòsámbò wisdom-sharing. Hewlett & Roulette's (2016) work on Aka caregivers teaching their infants has shown that different forms or styles of teaching may be employed in different domains of knowledge and skills: *"Teaching is used to transmit a broad range of skills and knowledge and the type of teaching varies with what is being transmitted and acquired."* (ibid: 11). Their results suggest that "negative feedback" and "redirect" were mostly employed to promote learning cultural norms. They defined "redirect" as when caregiver redirects the infant from doing something dangerous or inappropriate (ibid: 6), and negative feedback when the caregiver makes *"displeasing comments or sounds or moves infant's body"* from something bad dangerous (ibid). While *mòsámbò* does not involve bodily contact, it provides feedback to people and their behaviours, and promotes understanding of Mbendjele cultural norms and values. *Normative mòsámbò* by making "displeasing" comments on people's actions, and *celebratory mòsámbò* by giving positive evaluative feedback.

Some *mòsámbò* also uses techniques of *verbal instruction* in a meaning of "verbal explanation" (ibid: 6). By stating *"people who do this sort of thing are bad"* are direct statements of what are (un)desirable ways to act. Some statements are not so direct, but they imply the (un)desirability of people's actions. For example, *Àndʒélé*'s mother shouting: *"My child is not with Milo. My child is a good child!"* implies that having a Milo boyfriend is not good. Similarly, *Màbɔ́tà* saying: *"We would not want our children*

to be similar to Bilo!" implies that Bilo children are not good. Interestingly, however, not all speeches also explain *why* certain behaviours are bad. *Àndʒélé*'s mother did not explain why having Milo boyfriend is not good. As suggested by Quinn (2005: 499), adults' and parental child-rearing goals are usually held implicitly, but what adults raise children's attention to more explicitly is children's good and even more bad behaviour. *Mòsámbò* is an Mbendjele-specific venue for expressing such opinions and giving feedback on the behaviours of others, including children and their actions.

Repetition of the main messages could be also seen as a certain style of teaching, that enhances acquisition of Mbendjele cultural norms. Given the limited space here I did not include repetitions of speakers' phrases (tendencies of which were rightly criticised by Scalise Sugiyama 2017), but I have remarked that the speech can be solely composed of repeating a single phrase, as was for example in the case of one mother's shouting: *"Stop talking about my child!"* Or *Bɔ̀bílà*'s: *"Why Komba punishes me so much?"* Repeating shouting such phrases for hours can trigger more curiosity, and hence promote learning about what the message is about in comparison with a situation when the speaker would shout it once, or only several times.

Daily occurrence of *mòsámbò* provides ample opportunities for acquisition of cultural norms and values. This accords with the statement of Rogoff:

> "The rapid learning by children of their community's moral order may be accounted for by the *everyday events in which the child is provided with a moral commentary* indicating what is good and pure and what is bad and despicable." (Rogoff 2003: 224; my emphasis).

Since the *mòsámbò* protocol dictates repetition as its inherent feature, the speaker accentuates the main message and inculcates the Mbendjele normative worldview.

Mòsámbò as a skill. A systematic observational research of aforementioned *mòsámbò* imitative play in children groups can reveal the role of horizontal cultural transmission regarding both the *mòsámbò* form and the *mòsámbò* content. During my fieldwork, I have never experienced any form of direct teaching when an individual would be instructed how to perform *mòsámbò.* However, being exposed to *mòsámbò* on a daily

basis and obligation to listen to people's speeches can play crucial role in the reproduction of the speaking in terms of its form as well as an oratory skill.

***

Given that *mòsámbò* was highlighted as important venue for sharing wisdom, this chapter illuminates on some aspects of teaching interactions between adutls and children. In a similar fashion, the following chapter addresses *mòádʒò* and its potency in wisdom sharing and taking.

7 MÒÁDƷÒ

This chapter aims to portray diversity of, and richness and flexibility in application of *mòádʒò* by Mbendjele adults and children to promote people's ripening and maturity. I will delve into and exploit ethnographic vignettes of *mòádʒò* events to explain what *mòádʒò* means for adults and for children in terms of their "growing into wisdom".

Describing Mòádʒò

Mòádʒò are female public mocking re-enactments (Lewis 2009, 2014b, 2014a). Women, especially elderly women and widows, mimic someone's recent inappropriate, unacceptable or stupid behaviour. They repeat these dramatic performances till the person in question begins to laugh at him/herself, while name of the wrongdoer is never mentioned (Lewis 2002, 2009, 2014b, 2014a).

As further remarked by Lewis (2014a: 230), this type of performance is norm-asserting: *"By comically mimicking the wrongdoer, the women elicit a moralistic commentary from their audience that, by the end of the show, has served to communally map out the moral high ground."*. I will refer to these sort of performances as *"normative mòádʒò".* In my observation, people referred to different types of mockery events by the term of *mòádʒò.*

As outlined in Table 21, apart from delivering a moral lesson, *mòádʒò* was used for entertainment in female groups – from this point on I will refer to this sort of re-enactment as *"coalitionary mòádʒò",* as well as to counter male dominant behaviours – to this type of events I will refer to as *"gender-competition mòádʒò"*.

Table 21 *Mòádʒò* goals

Context	**Characteristics**	**Goals**
Normative	Re-enactments of inappropriate, unacceptable or stupid behaviours of individuals, which occurred in near past (Lewis 2009, 2014a). The person in question must be present in order to deliver the moral lesson.	Delivering moral lesson. Making the target realise his/her silly behaviours. Releasing tensions in the community.
Coalitionary	Re-enactments discussing issues perceived as funny, or generalised, stereotyped characteristics of individuals or groups. The individual or a group in target does not need to be present.	Public manifestations of collectively shared opinions. Strengthening/re-affirming Mbendjele female group solidarity.
Gender-competition	Re-enactments mocking men (mainly male sexuality). Part of female signature ritual or a response to a male insult. The target does not need to be necessarily present, but the "female presence/dominance" is important.	Temporary dominance over men. Female-to-male reverse dominance tool. "female militancy"

Mòádʒò can be planned or it can emerge spontaneously. Planning often occurs during female casual gatherings (*bèsímé yà bàítò*). It simply involves taking a collective decision to re-enact something that has taken place. However, details of how to re-enact certain issues are usually not discussed beforehand – that is let to the performer and her own performing style. Thus, while the subject of re-enactment is clear, it is up to individual performers how they perform it. Consequently, the performance is largely based on improvisation.

A spontaneous *mòádʒò* usually starts at the initiative of one woman who simply starts re-enacting something. If it is a normative performance, it is often prompted by the sudden appearance of the person in question. Other women who want to perform join in spontaneously, or the initial performer demands others to participate. If the performance

is mocking someone present, at certain point, people can demand for its end, considering that the person in question understood that his/her actions were improper or silly. See Table 23 below for examples of expressions that call for participation in the event and as well as to end the mockery.

Table 22 Demands to start and end *mòádʒò*

Starts with:	**Ends with:**
Bèké! ***Kàbá!***	***Sùká!*** ***Dì-sólé!***
give.IMP share.IMP	end.IMP 5-break
'Give!' 'Share!'	'Finish!' 'Take a break!'
Kàbá ***éndà*** ***àŋgóɸé!***	***M-à*** ***mò-sìá.***
share.IMP 7.thing 2SG.POSS	6-DEM.PROX 3-be.over.PRS
'Share your thing!'	'It's over!'
Bèk-é ***búsé*** ***nà*** ***mò-ɲɔ̀ŋgɔ!***	***Mò-kòká*** ***ké!***
give-IMP 1PL with 3-delicacy	3-enough.PRS EMPH
'Give us deliciously!'	'It's enough!'

Performing of *mòádʒò* is open to all women, but there are slight differences in who performs depending on the nature and main goal of *mòádʒò*. *Normative mòádʒò* is mainly performed by elderly women and widows (*kúsò*) (2014a: 229), childless women, women in unhappy (polygamous) marriages, disabled women, women with children with health conditions, or divorced women with children.

By its ability to humorously criticise issues of immorality or misconduct, *mòádʒò* empowers women in an Mbendjele society: (Lewis 2014b: 94). While disabled people often cannot equally contribute in terms of food, they can contribute differently – by telling fables, playing the harp to put people to peaceful sleep with beautiful dreams, or for example by dissolving tensions through *mòádʒò* performances. All people are valuable and important to community. However, performing *normative mòádʒò* is also their way of active *contribution* to the wellbeing of the group, referred to by the expressions of "helping" or in terms of "guardianship/things to look after":

Àmɛ́	***kàbá***	***mà-bɔ́***	***nà***	***mò-ádʒò***
1SG	share.PRS	6-hand	by	3-public.mocking

'I help by [doing] mòádʒò.'

Mò-ádʒò	***à***	***dìɛ́***	***è-kóndʒà***	***y-ámù.***
3-public.mocking	3SG	be.PRS	7- thing.to.look.after	7-1SG.POSS

'Mòádʒò is my thing to look after.'

These sorts of contributions are seen as important as contributions in food. The key is to contribute to one's best abilities, the character of contribution is not important.

This is different to *coalitionary mòádʒò*, which is primarily about entertainment. Thus, the performances are often done by women who simply enjoy entertain themselves and others. It is different too to *gender-competition mòádʒò,* where insulted or determined women perform as a response to an insulting incident or commentary. *Mòádʒò* can be also performed by a single female actor, but dyads and groups of three women were the most common. These groups are usually formed by the same women. Engaging in spontaneous performance requires coordination of the performers and as my informants explained – some women simply perform better together (*nà bò-lòngá*) than with other women. There are also women who dislike engaging in performances even when asked to contribute. These women prefer to *play* the role of audience instead. I prefer to use the term *"to play"*, since audience in *mòádʒò* context is *active* – they need to give feedback to the performers to make the performance "fulfilled". *Mòádʒò*'s audience must actively contribute or the *mòádʒò* ends –they should laugh, comment on the performers' moves, etc. In other words, if *mòádʒò* does not receive loud attention of others, it ends before reaching its goal. Often, the difference between the performers and audience cannot be clearly defined, since someone from audience can spontaneously began to perform, as well as performer can switch to play audience instead.

Table 23 Audience encourages performers

è-ssɛ́ŋgò!	***Bóná!***	***Bɔ̀sá!***	***Bódí!***
7-joy	like.that	take.IMP	again
'What a joy!'	'Like that!'	'Take!'	'Again!'
Kàbá	***mbálá***	***à***	***gàdìɛ́***
share.IMP	time	<	another
'Share once again!'			

Table 24 Audience communicates with audience

People from audience not only encourage performers, they loudly encourage others to watch and follow the event. This usually takes form of verbal descriptions of performers' actions. It is often accompanied by mimicking movements of the performers for themselves. For example, *"She does this, she does that!"* below was accompanied with mimicking *Bɔ̀télɛ́'s* movements and led this woman to join in the performance.

Tálá	***Bɔ̀télɛ́,***	***à-kàbá***	***nésú!***
look.IMP	female.name	3SG-share.PRS	1PL
'Look how Bɔ̀télɛ́ shares with us!'			
À-kìá	***bó,***	***à-kìá***	***bó!***
3SG-do.PRS	DEM	3SG-do.PRS	DEM
'She does this, she does that!'			
À-dwá,	***à-dwá!***		
3SG-go.PRS	3SG-go.PRS		
'And she's off, she's off!'			
À-mpìá	***nà***	***mò-ɲɔ̀ŋgɔ̀!***	
3SG-touch.PRS	with	3-delicacy	
'She performs the event deliciously!'			
ʃùlá	***nà***	***Bɔ̀télɛ́!***	
look.IMP	at	female.name!	
'Look at Bɔ̀télɛ́!'			

Mòádʒɔ̀ does not necessarily involve literal re-enactments of people's actions – the content can be expressed indirectly, in a metaphoric way. If an individual did not share food, the actions of non-sharing does not need to be represented. Women can focus on different attributes, characteristics, or issues related to the problem. For example: Elder *Bɔ̀bílà* left the camp in order to labour for Bilo. He received a gun, cigarettes and few bullets to kill several duikers and monkeys for this Bilo family. He left and his wife and children left with him. After a week the family returned and everything seemed alright, until the *mòádʒɔ̀* unfolded. *Mbúmà* was the only actor in the performance. She imitated *Bɔ̀bílà* by sitting in his typical way, stroking her belly as though it were full of food and pretending to hold a pipe and smoke. She appeared to have troubles standing, emphasising how full belly was, and when she tried to sit down, she rolled onto the floor.

When Mbendjele camp in the forest and some of the men are asked to hunt for Bilo, on

their way back to the village from hunting they tend to stop by at the camp and share at least a bit of meat with other members of the group. The meat which is to be delivered to Bilo is usually already smoked and certain parts of the animal are allowed to be eaten before handing it to Bilo. *Mbúmà* did not re-enact the actual behaviour of *Bɔ̀bílà.* This elderly man did not appear to have any of the 'full-belly' issues which *Mbúmà* represented. This performance metaphorically critiqued *Bɔ̀bílà's* non-sharing actions.

In contrast with *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò* occurs throughout the day and needs to be "seen". Language, or to be precise, actual words do not play as important a role here – *mòádʒò* is about re-enacting bodies – bodies in action. Women often simply pantomime the re-enacted event, and the verbal sensational expressions that accompany the action depicted are stretched out musically. These sensations carry specific meanings (see Table 26 for examples). While the expressions of "re-enacting" and "mimicking" are honest representations of how the actions of performers could be described, *mòádʒò* can also take a form of pantomime, where silent imitative gestures are employed, accompanied with these specific sounds.

Table 25 Sounds accompanying *mòádʒò* re-enactments

In this example, two women re-enact two men who stole plantains. The performance starts with re-enactment of these two men walking through the village fields, when they discover ripe plantains. These sounds are employed even in casual conversations. What makes *mòádʒò* special is that words rarely feature, instead performers use expletives and idiophones and these are amplified by the audience in volume and by stretching them musically. These sounds are common features of sang fables *gànɔ̀*, too (Fitzgerald 2011; Kilian-Hatz 2008; Kisliuk 1998).

Expression	**Description**
æ>ɛ ngwɛ́	The actor looks up at an imaginary tree and exclaims joyfully, surprised at the discovery.
kwà~kwà~kwà bà~ bà~ bà~ bà	The actors make this sound while pretending to cut plantains with machete. With each hit, they utter: *"kwà".* Baka employ *"kpò"* (Fitzgerald 2011: 249).
Falling sound: *wóóóò* Audience: *ìi͡i*	One actor attempts to put the plantains on the other actor's back, but the load is too heavy, and she falls on the ground. Also, falling sound for Baka (Kilian-Hatz 2001: 157).
èhɛ̀~èhɛ̀~èhɛ̀	Both actors hold the plantains so now they can walk with away with them. With each step, the actors exclaim: *"èhɛ̀".*
Some additional examples of the sounds:	

Expression	Description
wá~wá~wá~wá	Sound of bees when you smoke them away while collecting honey.
bòjò~bòjò~bòjò	Squishy sounds while serving meals from the pot to plates. Similar to Baka's *"jɔ̀bɔ̀ jɔ̀bɔ̀"* and *"jɔ̀gɔ̀ jɔ̀gɔ̀"* indicating walking through the water (Kilian-Hatz 2008: 391).
kwɛ́~ kwɛ́~ kwɛ́	Sound of a dying animal.
kɔ̀~kɔ̀~kɔ̀~kɔ̀	Sound of knocking. Similar to Baka (Kilian-Hatz 2008: 180).
dtooo	Shooting sound (Lewis 2009: 242).
bhuuuu	Sounds of arriving somewhere (Lewis 2009: 242).
teeeeeee *tetetetete*	Sounds of duration; length of utterance representing duration (Duke 2001: 81; Kilian-Hatz 2008: 180; Lewis 2009: 242).
uuuuaaaaarrr	Sound of impending catastrophe (Lewis 2009: 242).
ahhh *kwa*	Evoking the sound of thunder and lightening (Kisliuk 1991: 32).

These sounds can replace whole sentences and their primary function is to: *"create a relaxed atmosphere of communication between speaker and hearer through the illusion of a shared experience of participation in the reported event."* (Kilian-Hatz 2001: 156). They serve to dramatize the re-enacted event and make the actors and the audience directly involved (ibid: 156), presented as if the re-enacted event were occurring "here and now". Similar view is shared about the nature of *pantomimic* representation of reality. While Cross et al. (2013: 559) were interested in understanding evolution of music and language, they remark how pantomime evokes the "here and now": *"It is notable that participants may experience a form of "transportation" as consequence of pantomimic representation, as the interaction requires displacement of the experienced world."* Thus, by its pantomimic features, ***mòádʒò*** enables "transportation" of those present and re-live the mimicked event as it were "here and now".

Mòádʒò is public. More precisely, it *makes* public such acts, which the person in question would prefer to hide from others, because they are judged as "bad":

Mò-ádʒò	***à***	***fédìá***	***mè-ndɔ́***	***m-á***	***bà-tò***	***nà***	***mísɔ̀.***
3-public.mocking	3SG	show.PRS	4-issue	4-POSS	2-person	on	6.eye

'Mòádʒò makes/shows people's issues on public.'

Mòádʒò is designed to firstly elicit negative emotions and at the same time to force the person in target to cope with them by laughter. Nevertheless, in my observation, the person in target did not have to literally laugh. Simple signs of acknowledgement of their mis-behaviour(s) were sufficient – for example, a smile, or a nod.

Mòádʒò enables the person in target to see herself or himself how they look like from someone else's perspective. By doing so, it promotes self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is essential to formation of moral virtues (Kramer 2012), which *mòádʒò* educates about.

As remarked by Lewis, performers: *"repeat the scene many times as an audience collects around them."* (2014a: 230). The repetition can play important role in diminishing initial negative emotions when *mòádʒò* unfolds. The person in question symbolically re-experiences the mocked event over and over. Ideally, the repetitions should continue until they do not have a capacity to trigger (negative) emotional response. In general, emotional reactions to *normative mòádʒò* varied (see Table 26). The ideal response is laughter. Fleeing and hiding are also considered as proper responses to *mòádʒò*, since both reflect that the person in target acknowledges his/her misbehaviour. These actions are often commented on descriptively:

À	***ébá***	***dèʒà!***
3SG	know.PRS	already[FR:déjà]

'Now s/he understands!'

Or, for example:

À	***dìɛ́***	***nà***	***kúmbà!***
3SG	be.PRS	with	5.running

'Now s/he runs!'

If someone cries, people can ridicule her/him:

Mà-wà	***nà***	***mà-wà!***
6-sadness	with	6-sadness

'Sadness with sadness!'

While these commentaries are judgemental, after the performance, people are generally more empathetic. Being empathetic is easier after the performance, since *mòádʒò*

helped to cope with others' emotions about target's actions as well. For example, someone managed to hoard lots of foods. It is not only that hoarding is "bad" and should be ridiculed. Potentially, other people also wished for these goods and can feel angry and jealous. *Mòádʒò* helps also others in coping with these emotions by releasing the pressure in the camp. This accords with Lewis's observation that: *"A good performance will succeed in calming the atmosphere by allowing everyone to laugh and forget their anger."* (Lewis 2009: 243).

Table 26 Desirable and undesirable emotional reactions to *normative mòádʒò*

This table illustrates what expressions were used to describe people's reactions to being targeted in *mòádʒò.* At first, I considered claiming that *mòádʒò* elicits shame and embarrassment. In psychological literature, for example flight and hiding are signs of feeling ashamed and smile, giggle and covering mouth with a hand are signs of being embarrassed (Babcock & Sabini 1990; Gilbert 1998; Smith 2012; Tangney et al. 2007; Tangney & Dearing 2002). These publications are primarily based on research in Western societies, which poses difficulties in interpreting non-Western Mbendjele descriptions. While this table mentions some of the signs of shame-like and embarrassment-like behaviours, further systematic research on how Mbendjele describe these emotional experiences would be necessary. Mbendjele do not have specific expressions for embarrassment or shame, or an expression to discern embarrassment from shame. In some cases, *sóní* could be interpreted as shame (Oloa Biloa 2016), but as this table illustrates, it can also be employed to being sad or crying.

	Reaction	***Description***
Desirable	*mɔ̀tá*	Laughter or smile
	kúmbà	flight, running away
	bómbà	hiding
Undesirable	*mà-wà, sóní, lèlá*	being sad, crying
	sìmóyá, kànísà, swí	thoughtful, quiet
	bówó	being resentful, acting offended
	mò-kétì, bélí	being upset, aggressive-prone
	mòsúkú búdì, kílí-kílí	stubborn, impossible to think straight

The situation is different if the person reacts in an improper way. These reactions include: being quiet, sad, acting offended, upset, aggressive, or stubbornly denying the re-enacted actions. If some of these emotions is displayed, ridiculing can continue. However, the improper emotion displayed can become the key issue of ridicule, and not the wrong actions, initially ridiculed. This also shows that *mòádʒò* contributes to people's emotional ripening by sharing normative expectations and wisdom of culturally appropriate ways of displaying emotions.

In his study of informal (as opposed to formal, state schooling) of Aka, Koulaninga (2009: 80–81) observed that public mockery and ridicule plays important role in teaching "youngsters" and maintaining social order. However, the author does not specify the gender of performers nor he provides ethnographic examples to illustrate his point. He mentioned that that the most frequent issues of of public mockery concerned recent fights and disputes, sexuality, and Bilo-like behaviours.

Normative mòádʒò ridicules non-sharing, greediness, selfishness, dishonesty, cheating, laziness, arrogance, boastfulness, carelessness about others, cowardice, intolerance, moodiness, grumpiness, impulsiveness, aggression, possessiveness to material objects and food, or such malevolent actions as plotting against someone, demanding too much from others, manipulating others to obtain things, or taking on behaviours or characteristics of Bilo.

The following is an ethnographic example of *normative mòádʒò*:

> Bilo employed several men to hunt an elephant, and in exchange Mbendjele received two containers of palm wine, plantains, cassava, and clothing. There is a convention that part of the payment is done before the actual work and part after the work. Giving part of the payment beforehand is believed to encourage to more productive work. It also leads to immediate consumption of alcohol – *Àɸélà* as well as other women got very drunk.
>
> There was lots of singing, joking, and chatting. At one point, *Àɸélà* gave her machete to her mother *Mbúmà*, after *Mbúmà's* complaints that her machete is too old. Elderly people have their ways of demanding things. *Mbúmà* complained about her machete persistently that night. She was enumerating

all the shortcomings of her machete and recounted on all possible things that she could do with the new one.

The next day people woke up hung-over. And soon *Àɸélà* found out that her machete was missing. She furiously entered in each hut and eventually found it hidden under *Mbúmà's* bed. *Àɸélà* was very upset and put up a fight with *Mbúmà*. With no effect, other women tried to explain that she gave machete to *Mbúmà* yesterday. It took an hour till she finally calmed down, but she was still sitting in front of her hut quietly, frowning.

In the afternoon (no one went gathering as there was plenty of cassava and plantains from Bilo), *Mbúmà* and *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́* (*Àɸélà's* sister) began their *mòádʒɔ̀*. In an exaggerated way, they were pulling each other's hair, running one after another, entering in the huts, throwing things around. *Mbúmà* even pretended to cry. The performance took about five minutes, when *Àɸélà* began to laugh loudly.

Mbúmà's and *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́'s* performance made *Àɸélà* see her silly actions right in front of her eyes. Such possessive behaviours to material objects are rather Bilo-like than Mbendjele-like. However, the performance was an exaggeration of *Àɸélà's* actions. For example, she did not cry as *Mbúmà* did during the performance, she did not pull anyone's hair either. After the show, *Mbúmà* returned the machete. As a consequence, the tension in the camp ceased and everyone went back to what they were doing before.

Coalitionary mòádʒɔ̀

Performances mocking someone's behaviour in his or her absence also take place. These re-enactments usually occur during gathering trips in small groups of women and children. Especially, mocking stereotyped perceptions of individuals or groups are very common. Typically, *coalitionary mòádʒɔ̀* mocks what Mbendjele women disapprove of Bilo, about outsiders, children, men, or even eco-guards. These *mòádʒɔ̀* serve to collectively recognise and share opinions, or simply to amuse or entertain in the group.

Example of such a performance is represented graphically in the Plate 3. Two Bilo women came to visit me. They were in a very good moods and began to dance – they wanted to be captured on my camera. Mbendjele find Bilo women dancing style

awkward, clumsy, and funny. And as the pictures illustrate, they amused themselves by mimicking Bilo's dancing style. This performance was non-normative, and the presence of the targets could even cause potential conflicts. Kisliuk observed a similar case of mockery about Bilo by her BiAka informants. She emphasised its role in resistance to Bilo and their oppressive behaviour towards Biaka:

> "Justin said that in the past it was even worse, bilo would sometimes kill Biaka for not working or for stealing, and Biaka have no legal resource, only sorcery. But Biaka also have more obvious forms of resistance to bilo. *I saw Sandimba and others regularly mock the village dance style, and during a Mabo song I once heard someone interject an ironic line, "the pygmy is smelly"* in the Dingando language." (Kisliuk 1991: 330; my italics).

Plate 3 Example of *coalitionary mòádʒò*

Plate 3 Example of *coalitionary mòádʒò* (continued)

Bilo women came to visit and began to dance. Note the facial expression of a young girl standing in the door-way (3rd picture). She is laughing, because behind the Bilo women's back, there are Mbendjele women mimicking their dancing positions. As soon as Bilo left, women continued in amusing themselves and then re-enacted the Bilo dance in front of the camera. They asked me if I can take pictures of their dance, stood in front of me and showed their buttocks exactly as the Bilo women did just few minutes ago.

If *coalitionary mòádʒò* concerns Bilo, it can occur in front of men, or even with their assistance. The following ethnographic example illustrates this point:

> An elderly Milo man passed away. This man belonged to the clan of the chimpanzee. As is common during important ceremonies, Mbendjele were involved in the preparation of the funeral (*màtáŋgà*) – in the ritual dancing and singing part of it, as well as in the food preparation.
>
> If a Milo man passes away, Mbendjele perform the male-spirit ritual *Èdʒéŋgì.* Besides *Èdʒéŋgì*, Mbendjele men were asked to help get the soul of the Chimpanzee-Milo to leave peacefully. This *mòkóndì màssánà* is called *Shó*. *Shó* brings men: *"together with arms over each other's shoulders, stamping in unison through camp late at night, emphasizing male brawn and unity as the deep bassy growl of Sho and foot-stamping reverberates through the camp."* (Lewis 2002: 139, 2016: 151–152). During the ceremony, a group of men engage in synchronised small-step movements and in this way walk from house to house. One of the man holds two pieces of bamboo sticks to appoint the rhythm and sings solo before others join him in a sort of call-response way.
>
> Once the group of men reached the front of my house, *Mbúmà*, along with other women, began their *mòádʒò*. Women laughed, imitated chimpanzee sounds, walked on their knuckles before falling down screaming, as if they were dying. At the same time, children shrieked excitedly and all other people present laughed wildly. The group of men who performed *Shó* tried to remain serious, but some of them burst out laughing, at which point a chain of laughter spread through all of them. At that point, *Mbúmà* exclaimed:
>
Tómbá	***ɲìàmà***	***wɛ́nɛ́***	***mò-síká!***
take.IMP	9.animal	DEM.PROX	far.away

> 'Take that animal far away!'
>
> Other women repeated the request until the men left. After this incident, everyone calmed down and returned to what they were doing before.

This performance represented a collective recognition of what this group of women (and also men) thought about the deceased Milo man. It occurred in front of and with assistance of men. These *mòádʒò* are very bonding and could be understood as one of signature strengthening activities of the community – against Milo, Mbendjele women and men stand together.

Mòádʒò is central both tool and manifestation of female groups – emboldening strength and solidarity (see Table 27). Women spend most of their time together: they work together, gossip, share intimate information, bath together, they take care of each other's children and even beauty. They also actively protect each other against male violence, support women in conjugal disputes (even if it is clear that the woman was the wrongdoer), and engage in collective actions to obtain meat from men.

Table 27 Examples of manifestations of female group solidarity

Frequent touch, intimacy, closeness
Cooperation in economic production
Cooperation in child care-taking
Active protection against (male) violence
Collective enhancements of beauty
Exchange of "gifts" bracelets, necklaces) or small personal possessions
Chatting, gossiping, joking (*bèsímé*), mocking (*mòádʒò*)
Sound synchronism

Physical closeness and touch has been acknowledged in female spirit performances (*"saŋganye njo", "mixing up the bodies",* Lewis 2016: 152), but women engage in this physical unison even on casual occasions. As remarked by Meehan (2005: 91): *"Aka women sit and work very close to each other",* or using the words of Bonnie L. Hewlett (2005: 329), Aka are: *"sitting as close as space allows."* Unlike men, when women sit next to each other, their shoulders or legs touch one another, or they sit tightly one in front of another. When I arrived in the field, I remember that, at first, it felt almost uncomfortable that women who I did not know, engaged in such frequent touch with me and sit so closely to me. Nevertheless, it made me realise, how this can accelerate

bonding and feeling “natural” in a companion with other, practically strange women. In my observation, even when Mbendjele women met other Mbendjele women for the first time, they automatically sat very close to each other and if men weren’t present, they exchanged quite intimate information (see Figure 24 for an example).

Figure 24 Example of female conversations

Àɸélà is laughing about how she refused sex to her husband because of his bad smell and laziness (in providing meat). But now he smells nicer (he returned with meat) and she will “cook” his penis tonight, also because her “vagina is hungry”. This is an example of what characteristics the conversations in female groups can be.

In cases of male violence towards a woman, other women immediately support her and provide a shelter and protection for her, insult and beat the man (see Figure 25). When it comes to the beauty, women help each other in hairstyle and the applications of make-up. In general, women use mostly black, white, and red pigments. The most popular red pigment is called *mòngólé,* obtained from dead bark of *Pterocarpus soyauxii*. In Baka language it is called *mbélé* (Nole et al. 2016: 7). Also known for its medicinal use for physical asthenia, muscle atrophy, painful urine, and insomnia (ibid: 4). Also, Twa women from Congo-Kinshasa use red *mòngólé* paste from the same species after giving birth for the first time (Pagezy 2013: 24).

Skill in intentional enactment of synchronised behaviour signals strength of the group coalitions (Fessler & Holbrook 2016). Mbendjele women engage in various forms of sound synchronism. There are some anticipatory statements that demand synchronised responses. For an example of Mbendjele female synchronised chorusing, see Figure 27.

Figure 25 Female beating tools

In my observation, Mbendjele women often use cooking utensils when beating men. This is *kìngì lèbóká* – a tool for pounding oil palm nuts to make an oil. It can weight about 2-3kg and is made of hard wood. Apart from *kìngì*, they like to use also burning logs from fire (Hewlett 1991a: 41; Kisliuk 1991: 279; Leonhardt 1999; Turnbull 1961: 123). (Note that I have never seen using these utensils to beat a child or even to threaten the child with these utensils.).

Figure 26 *Pàtà-pàtà*

Among women in Sombo Thanry, it is popular to burn skin to achieve coin-shaped *pàtà-pàtà* bodily decoration – see the arm of the woman on the right. When women from Djoubé visited, making each other *pàtà-pàtà* was one of the main beauty-enhancing bonding activities in female groups.

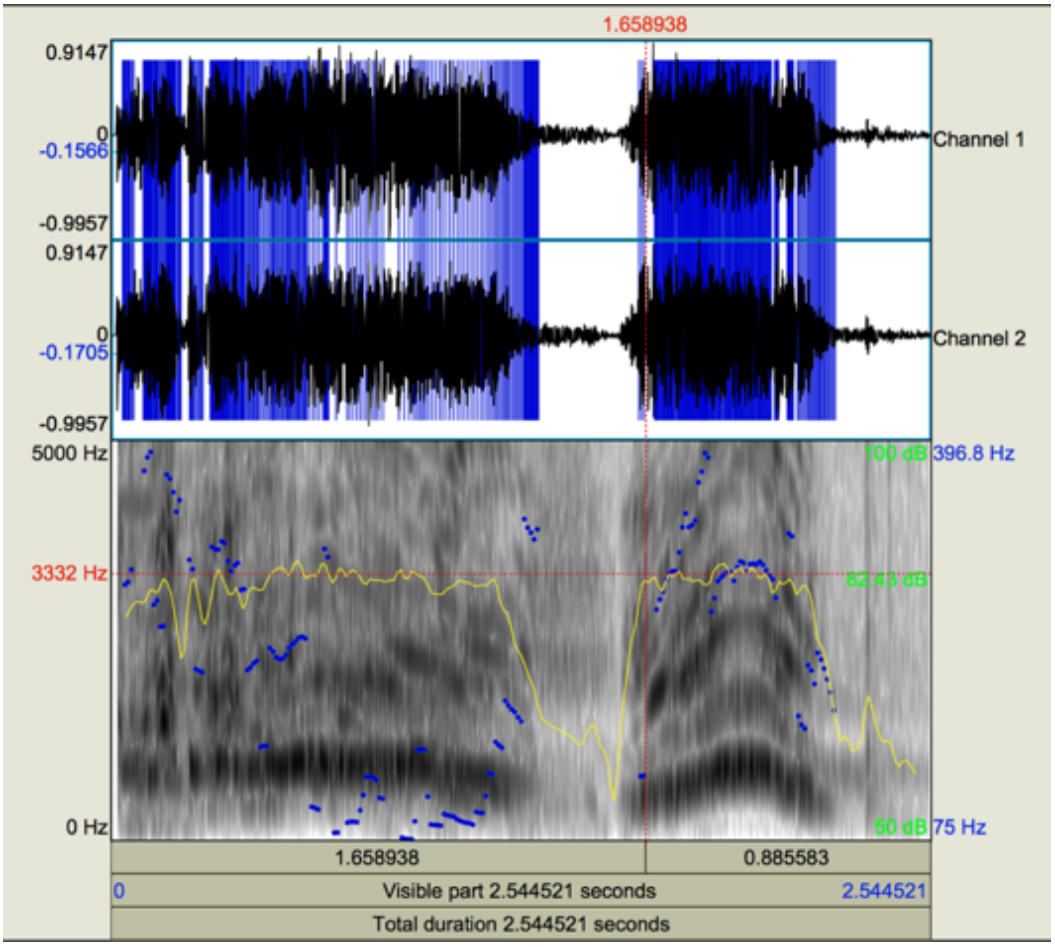

Figure 27 Example of female synchronised chorusing

I asked ten women to demonstrate one type of synchronised chorusing for me. This is a sound spectrograph of their demonstration. The picture was generated through linguistic software called PRAAT (Boersma & Weenink 1992) which is used in acoustic phonetics for speech analysis. Chorusing is not exactly an act of speaking, but it could be understood as a form of phonetic event.

The picture represents two synchronised yelled sequences of vowels. As you can see from the yellow intensity line, there are two outbursts of high frequency and intensity. The first is twice as long as the second. The first yelled outburst is always longer than the second, as that is the moment when all women who are present are "tuning in". In other words, during this first sequence, women "wait for each other" to get synchronised. The pitch, as you can see from the blue dots goes down from a peak during the first outburst and is peaking again during the second. If you imagine a line roughly connecting the blue dots you would get the pitch track. Both outbursts consist of vowels, which is encoded in the black and grey background. In the first sequence, there is a quick movement from a more open vowel to a closed **æ>ɛ>I**. Then, the whole group pauses while taking a breath in synchrony, and then again outburst in a peaking front vowel **i** in the second sequence.

Gender-competition Mòádʒò

Mòádʒò employed to mock general characteristics of men were most commonly performed before and after the female forest-spirit ritual *Íŋgòkú,* but not exclusively. The function of these sorts of performances is *not* to raise issues of morality, but to re-asset female values.

Unlike hierarchism, (gender) egalitarianism is a *dynamic* political system – its success depends on repeated assertion (Woodburn 1982: 431).Thus, the power between the genders is always in the course of negotiation: *"Inherently diffusive and dialogical, egalitarian power functions through a process of continual oscillation through time and space."* (Finnegan 2017: 131). Each gender – the coalition of females and the coalition of males – employ different strategies and tools to empower their own group and/or to counter the dominance of the other gender. As described above, *mòádʒò* is one of the female coalitionary tool, but it serves also reverse dominance tools as well. Table 28 is a list of collective beauty-enhancing strategies to tease men, and Table 29 includes non-beauty strategies.

Morna Finnegan (2008, 2013, 2017) and Lewis (2002) liken this sort of gender politics to a pendulum (*pendulum model*), in which dominance and counter-dominance pulses between the females as a group and males as a group. Ideologically, nor women nor men have constant power over the other, and neither of the groups is accorded a greater value: *"Egalitarian gender relations do not mean that everyone is the same, but rather that each gender group has strengths or qualities that are different from the other, but socially they are equally valued."* (Lewis 2014b: 94). "Sameness" as a measure of egalitarianism does not exist in an Mbendjele culture. Contrary – it is the cultivation of diversity which matters.

Throughout this thesis, I have cited Christopher Boehm multiple times in respect to egalitarian sanctioning and social control tools. Nonetheless, I agree with Chris Knight (2014) in that Boehm's approach in understanding egalitarian relations in humans lacks the role of *gender* in reverse dominant strategies. As theorised by evolutionary anthropologist Camilla Power, egalitarianism of hunting and gathering societies emerged as a result of *female coalitions* and their reproductive strategies (Power 2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c).

Table 28 Female beauty-enhancing strategies

Un-attractive body (*ndʒòmbé*) is undesirable. While everyone is born different and some people are seen as more beautiful than others, there are many techniques to improve one's beauty and attractiveness. Attractiveness can be measured in various ways, for example by proficiency in hunting and gathering, or dancing and controlling forest spirits, however, this table focuses on the bodily, physical attraction.

"On-Body" Application	
Visual Attraction *"ènìè nà mísɔ̀"* *"beauty on the eyes"*	Application of pigments (*"mómbí"*) – usually mixed up with saliva (*"màté"*), or oil: palm oil (*"màdí má mbílà"*), kernel palm oil (*"màdí má díká"*); animal fat, e.g. extracted from duiker species (*"màdí má bémbà"*)* or wild pig (*"màdí má ŋgwíà"*). Black (*"mòyíndò"*/*"mopindo" in Lewis 2008: 302), e.g. mobola* Red (*"mòtélé"*) – mostly from *mòngólé.* White (*"mòpúmbú"*) – mostly clay or ashes of specific plants. Kernel palm oil (*"màdí má díká"*) for shininess and illusion of fatness – healthiness. Teeth pointing (*"mòkésà mínɔ̀"*). Scarring, incisions & tattooing (*"màmbádì"*). Skin-burns (*"pàtà-pàtà"*). Piercing (*"mòtúbà", "holes-making"*). Eyebrows shaving (*"mòkúbà màkíkí"*).
Sensory Attraction *"màsɔ̀ mò-ɲìè"* *"beautiful smell"*	*Utilisation of forest perfumes – it is essential to keep walking by the man one wishes to be with.* <u>*Includes:*</u> Attaching plants to woman's cloths, baskets, tying plants around neck, ankles, wrists, or in the earholes. Smashing plant to extract its "milk" (*"lélé"*) to apply on the body (mostly face, neck, wrists, and armpits, but also teeth and hair). Drinking extracts from plants, or roots, or adding them in cooking (but not sharing them with other women).
"In-Body" Application	
Consumption of beauty-enhancing forest medicine**	<u>*For multiple purposes:*</u> To increase muscular strength in order to be better "worker" (hard-working people are sexy). To reduce sweating, or the smell of the sweat (sweat is un-attractive). To make the eyes shiny (to enhance chances of the man falling in love). To achieve having bigger buttocks (central to sexual attraction). To raise up falling breasts (breasts are for breastfeeding, but important for sexual attraction, too). To reduce hair growth (nor long hair on the head neither everywhere else is attractive).

**Cephalophus sylvicultor* **There are more practices, but I respect my informants' will in not sharing them.

Table 29 Female collective strategies in securing male's nutritional provisioning and infant care

Going on "Strike"	Refusing sex Refusing to work (e.g. gather, fish)
Cooking Medicines Adding medicinal ingredients into cooking	To endure pain, hunger, or various forms of suffering to those males who do not provide – the tricky thing is not to overdo it – one must very careful in portioning the *"bad medicine"* (*"bwàŋgà mò-bé"*). To make husband's heart pound so quickly that will make him feel dizzy because of love and secure his return. If the men make excuses why they cannot go hunt, women make a broth with plant that makes them telling the truth.
Verbal Persuasion in female-male public discussions	*"Meat-hunger causes weakness and illnesses (in children)."** *"Meat can resolve conflicts (with Bilo)."* *- Claiming that people need to engage in more enchanting activities, e.g. màssánà, but they need meat for doing that.*

* "meat hunger" was also observed by Bahuchet (1985: 421), and BaKoya refer to it as *"disette"/"dinzàu"* (Soengas López 2009: 198).

Content-wise*, gender-competition mòádʒò* mostly refers issues of male sexuality. From Mbendjele female perspective, men have uncontrollable sexual desire for women. Mbendjele women attempt to increase sexual desire in men through cosmetics and body decorations, as well as through luring dances. Nonetheless, in their daily conversations, in *mòádʒò*, as well as their *Íngòkú* songs (Lewis 2002: 159), they *deny* men's control over the sexuality. Men's sexual "hunger" is presented as weakness, easily exploitable by women for their and their children's benefit. Accordingly: *"the teasingly assertive songs, mostly about women's commentary on sexual relations, have a humorous slant that ridicules men and provokes their resistance."* (Kisliuk 1991: 266). As reported by Hewlett & Cavalli-Sforza (1992: 8), Mbuti ridicule others' genitalia, but they do not specify the gender.

Mbendjele females publicly deny their interest in sex or that sexual attraction would be an important matter in their lives. By publically I mean *towards males*. It appears that

within the female groups, they share tips and engage in collective activities to enhance their sexual attraction, but in the presence of men, they actively deny it. Such practices entail utilisation of plants to 'smell beautifully', or for example forest medicines to reduce the amount of pubic hair.

The following presents an ethnographic example of *gender-competition mòádʒò*:

> On one occasion after female ritual performance *Íngòkú*, women re-enacted husband's attempts for making love in the hut. It was performed by two women, one was playing husband and the other was playing wife. They placed the child in-between them and pretended that it was the time to go sleep. Woman snored to make sure that the audience understands that she sleeps. Her husband though began stroking the wife's breast.
>
> His actions were interrupted, when the child began to cry (one of the actors instructed the child to pretend to cry). Woman soothed the baby and the husband continued – this time he put his hand under her clothing, continued to stroke her. Then he tried to move the child away, so he could get closer to the woman. But the child began to cry again (The child was again instructed to cry). The women continued to mimic husband's efforts in getting closer to the wife, repeatedly failing to achieve his goal. This show was accompanied by hilarious laughter of the audience, and encouragements for repetitions.

This is an example of a typical *gender-competition mòádʒò.* The wife is represented as she does not need as much sex as her husband:

Bà-tòpáì	***bà***	***dìɛ́***	***nà***	***ʤàlà***	***è-nɛ̀kɛ́***	***ndɛ́ŋgɛ́***	***mɔ̀tí***	***màí!***
2-man	3PL	be.PRS	with	5.hunger	7-vagina	5.way	one	6.water

'Men's hunger for vagina is the same as for the water.'

This performance also conveys a message about how foolish the husband is with his constant, clumsy attempts to make love as well as that sex is in the centre of female reverse dominance tools.

During such performances, men often feel ashamed, sometimes smile, some of them rather avoid being present. In some cases, this can even cause violence (Lewis 2002: 195). However, sudden sensitive reactions of men are ridiculed as well. As an elderly man *Bɔ̀bílà* remarked, the best strategy to deal with females in such circumstances is to be quiet (“*swí”, “fish”*). On one occasion, I have witnessed, that the ridiculed man retreated to his hut, while other men who were not targets of the ridicule, mocked him as well, because of *“being scared of women”* (*bɔ́mɔ́ wà bàítò*). Kisliuk (1991: 285) observed that some Biaka men were very sensitive to such mockery during Dingboku events, which are in her words ‘super-feminine’. The author further remarked that this could have been heightened by the fact that men in Kisliuk’s fieldsite used to port water for Bilo, and could have been feeling feminised, and more sensitive to these mockery events.

Gender-competition mòádʒò can be also triggered by an insult. The previous ethnographic example depicts what women as a group think of men *in general* – it is rather a form of amusement, entertainment. However, if an Mbendjele female is insulted by an inappropriate action of a man (e.g. her husband or boyfriend), the response in *mòádʒò* is more aggressive, obscener, and vulgar. It can entail public insults, obscenity, and in comparison with other forms of *mòádʒò*, more exaggerated shaming gestures. Such *mòádʒò* can begin with anger, but finish by mockery and laughter. Other females immediately support each other and join the beating (see Figure 25) or performance, because *all* females were insulted.

Children’s mòádʒò

Children actively employ *mòádʒò* in similar ways as adults do – for entertainment, to give others feedback on their actions, or in order to resolve issues in children’s groups or issues with adults. The main difference between adults’ and children’s *mòádʒò* is that child performers are not restricted to girls only. Even though less frequently, also boys perform. However, as children grow up, boys and girls ripen in different ways. While girls continue to spend most of their time together, boys gradually become more individualistic and, in respect to gender expectations, quieter: *“When out hunting men explicitly value quietness in speech and movement.”* (Lewis 2014b: 78). Quietness of

men is valued also outside of hunting events and talkative boys are mocked by other men:

À	***dìé***	***nà***	***mù-ɲòá***	***ndéŋgé***	***mɔ̀tí***	***nà***	***mò-átò.***
3SG	be.PRS	with	3-mouth	5.way	one	with	1-woman

'He has a mouth like a woman.'

Mòádʒò performances are loud, coalitionary, and require high degree of coordination among performers. Thus, as boys pass through life, it would be increasingly more difficult for them to perform *mòádʒò* without being ridiculed the performing itself and with such degree of coordination, as women achieve through their spent time and intimate knowledge of each other.

Typical *mòádʒò* in children groups involves mocking failures in accomplishing tasks – when children lack certain knowledge, or misinterpret others' actions. For example: mistakes in drumming, in remembering the words of a song or rhyme, or for example, inability to climb a tree. On one occasion, I was following four young girls playing a game. *Móŋgàì* made few wrong steps and hesitated in few important movements. Seemingly, noone paid attention to it, but after the game was over and the girls sat with other children and chatted casually, one of the girls who played the game – *Mòsáŋgì* – stood up and imitated her friend *Móŋgàì* and her clumsy steps. She repeated it several times, with increasing exaggeration of the wrongness of *Móŋgàì's* movements. All girls were laughing, including *Móŋgàì*. While this *mòádʒò* was an act of entertainment, it created a special 'wisdom sharing' opportunity for the children present. What *Mòsáŋgì* did was a demonstration of how *not* to play the game, she taught other girls about its wrongness.

What distinguishes *mòádʒò* in children groups from adults' *mòádʒò* is that children mock also distinct physical and mental abilities of others – differences in skin colour, being too tall, too fat, too small. In other words, being different from others in some way. This greatly contrast with the adult Mbendjele culture, which promotes originality and individuality, and as I have explained in *How Humans Ripen* chapter, adults promote individuality and "let the children to grow in their ways".

A boy called *Lùné* was considered as having a darker skin than other children. At least, from children's perspective, since I have never heard adults making such a statement.

Children often called him "the black" (*mò-yíndò*). His reactions to children's mocking were often aggressive, and it seemed as children enjoyed mocking him to provoke this aggression. Once, a group of girls returned from their short trip in the forest with their bodies painted in black. After spotting *Lùné,* immediate ridiculing began. They repeated such claims as:

Kɛ́nɛ̀kɛ́nɛ̀	***búsɛ́***	***bɛ́sɛ́***	***bà-dìɛ́***	***ndɛ́ŋgɛ́***	***mɔ̀tí***	***nà***	***Lùné!***
now	1PL	all	1PL-be.PRS	5.way	one	with	male.name

'We are all like Lune now!'

They were running around in circles, while *Lùné* was trying to chase them and hit them with a stick. He failed as other boys did not support him in beating the girls back. However, when this took too long and *Lùné* started to cry, his grandfather *Bòkúndú* told the children to cease that noise. Typically, adults do not intervene in children's *mòádʒò*. Mocking *Lùné,* however, was understood as "bothering" (*bò-sàkídìè*) that produces unwanted noise and disorder that needs to be ceased. *Bòkúndú* taught the children that such *mòádʒò* is wrong – if *mòádʒò* produces noise, instead of ceasing it, then, it is not a good *mòádʒò*.

Figure 28 Boys' physical intimacy

In my observation, boys show similar physical closeness and solidarity as girls do. However, boys are gradually encouraged to become more individualistic, which leads to less physical closeness. This picture was taken in the forest camp *Kwɔ́nà*. The boys were raising each other's hair. While this sort of beauty-enhancing session is commonly practiced in female-and-children groups, adult men tend to engage in such practices individually or ask their wives for help. I have never seen men as a group engaging in make-up practices together.

Children employ *mòádʒò* to mock adults, too. This was also observed by Turnbull about Mbuti children:

> "One of the huts was in flames, and people were standing all around, either crying or shouting. There was a lot of struggling going on among a small group of men, and women were brandishing fists in each other's faces. We decided to go back to the main camp, which by then was filled with clusters of men and women standing about discussing the affair. Not long afterward a contingent from Cephu's group came over. They swore at the children, who, delighted by the whole thing, were imitating the epic flight and pursuit of Kelemoke." (1961: 113).

Adults take children's re-enactments seriously and give positive feedback to well-designed performances by applause and laughter. They also give feedback to inappropriate elements of performances, focusing both on the technicalities as well as suitability of the content. For example, children were criticised when continuing in mockery after the person in question laughed about him/herself:

> There was a group of young girls who imitated one elderly man. This man was known for his passion for alcohol. The girls were imitating his clumsy walking, and how he would fall on the ground, curse out loud, and swing a machete around as if trying to hit an imaginary person in front of him. To begin with, women were laughing as they watched this performance. And after a while even this old man was laughing. Nevertheless, the girls did not stop their *mòádʒò* at this point, which annoyed the old man as well as the women. The girls stopped only after being scolded by one of the most senior women in the group, who was looking for a stick on the ground to throw at them. The girls carried on laughing and, pretending to be very afraid, ran into the forest.

Similarly, children's attempts to publicly mock people's mental dis-abilities were criticised. For example, there was one man who was considered as 'without intelligence'. Children often mocked him directly and gave him nicknames. For example, they called him *ndékέ,* which is a tree bark, typically put in palm wine in order to make it bitter. This man used to smoke pieces of this tree bark in his pipe, which was

often ridiculed by adults, too (but mostly not in his presence). However, one should not mock something about the person that s/he cannot change – for who s/he is, but for the actions s/he does. And if so, it should take a form of *coalitionary mòádʒò,* in that person's absence. What these girls attempted to do was *normative mòádʒò,* but there is nothing improper about being "without wisdom".

One evening in the camp, there was a dispute in regards to a theft – a head torch was missing. The atmosphere in the camp was very tense even after the dispute was over. Adult women were not performing *mòádʒò* – they were still upset about the whole issue. But children amused themselves by engaging in *mòádʒò,* mimicking adults and their quiet and upset faces. Children continued on with their *mòádʒò* till adults began laughing. Thus, even children can contribute to conflict-resolution among adults and point to adults' "unripe" behaviours.

Children also mock teaching practices of instructors from outsider-imposed school in Djoubé, to which I will return later in the thesis.

Mòádʒò to and for Children

Women also mock general characteristics of children. For example, infants' inabilities to walk, talk, sit, or sing; imitations of their grimaces; their attempts to search for breast, and similar issues. These performances could be understood as examples of *coalitionary mòádʒò*. Infants are not necessarily present during these performances – women simply amuse themselves in sharing alike observations and opinions about infants and children. For example, women mocked newborn babies' lips licking in search of breast, which was imitated and referred to as *"múŋòà wà mbólókó",* meaning *"duiker's mouth"* (see also Figure 29).

Figure 29 *Dʒíngò* with her daughter *Bɛ́*

It took about a month that *Bɛ́* made these sorts of grimaces and funny faces. These were often mocked and mimicked during female casual gatherings through *coalitionary mòádʒò*. Once, I have heard women remarking that *Bɔ́kɔ́* when *Dʒíngò* asks him to cult palm nuts, implying surprise and laziness.

On a different occasion, women in group sat close to each other with their infants around. All three babies did not know how to sit straight and women put them to sit and watched how they slowly fall while catching them gently before reaching the ground. It provoked hilarity and women imitated the same thing even days after and they found it funny. These performances are affectionate and lavishing.

Lewis emphasized educational role of *mòádʒò: "By comically mimicking the wrongdoer, the women elicit a moralistic commentary from their audience that, by the end of the show, has served to communally map out the moral high ground. Mòádʒò educates those present about Mbendjele values."* (Lewis 2014a: 230).

Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́ once remarked that:

Bá-nà	***bà-dìɛ́***	***nà***	***bò-mɔ́***	***wà***	***mò-ádʒò.***
2-child	3PL-be.PRS	with	14-fear	POSS	3-public.mocking

'Children are scared of mòádʒò.'

However, *mòádʒò* teasing nature differs from the *lani-mani* practices of Warlpiri – as described by Musharbash (2016). Warlpiri adults mock children to intentionally elicit fear in order to protect them from for example walking too far from the camp. The fear here, as suggested by *Bɔ̀télɛ́* is about sensitivity to being mocked.

Even though adult-to-children *mòádʒò* is less common than adult-to-adult *mòádʒò*, these sorts of performances are crucial in terms of understanding how Mbendjele adults *intentionally* promote children's ripening by mocking them.

Adult-to-children *normative mòádʒò* differs from adult *mòádʒò* described at the beginning of the chapter. Performances addressed to children are shorter at length and involve less repetitions. Women modify *mòádʒò* in order to enhance effectiveness of learning in children. For example, the performer directly stares at the child when re-enacting his or her behaviour. This strategy makes the child realise that it is him or her who is being ridiculed. Additionally, the performance happens shortly after the child's mis-behaviour. This is to make sure that the child remembers his or her behaviour.

When women mock children, they tend to mock unwanted behaviours, not necessarily norm transgressions or serious issues. Serious issues in children's behaviour is predominantly dealt with by means of *mòsámbò* public speaking, scolding, and direct criticism.

Mòádʒò was often employed to educate about proper expressions of emotions when behaving both in a proper way. For example, elder children learned about the fact that they have to share on demand, but if expressing angriness or huffiness while sharing, women often employed *mòádʒò* to mock about these instances.

Independency

> *Bémbà* was one of those children who suffered from the weaning period. Interactions of him and his mother were common discussion in women's gossip. Mother felt pressure from the women to help *Bémbà* in becoming more independent. Often, when *Bémbà* played in children group, other children mocked him. He would return back to his mother, sit close to her, and reach for her breast to get a little bit of milk. Breastfeeding, in general,

> is used by Mbendjele mothers to sooth the child.
>
> This time, however, the mother refused, as she was getting ready for a gathering trip. She stood up and walked across the camp to one of women, who were preparing a meal. She would sit close to one of them and reach for her breast. The women and children who were present, began to laugh hilariously. Then, the mother would go to another women and repeat the same.
>
> *Bémbà* would begin to cry. At that moment the other women began to mimic him crying with exaggeratedly sad facial expressions. Children were following this cluster of performances with laughter, while pointing at *Bémbà.* The boy left a little further from the camp, where he sat and continued on crying. Nor children nor adults came to soothe his cry.

This *mòádʒò* was employed to facilitate weaning. It shows, that ridicule can be very harsh, whether it is a child or an adult. The reaction of *Bémbà* was only partially correct. As mentioned above, fleeing is an understandable reaction. Crying, unlike fleeing, is improper. It made other children to mock *Bémbà* even more. By leaving *Bémbà* being alone with his cry, both adult women and other children promoted *Bémbà*'s self-transcendence.

Howell also reported mocking and teasing the child who was too old to be breastfed:

> "About 30% of children born are not followed by another birth, and these lucky children wean themselves from the breast when they are ready, typically around forty-eight months, trailing off to sixty months. Eventually children grow too large to be carried constantly as nursing children typically are, and the mother cannot or is not willing to carry her child on gathering expeditions. Occasionally one sees a "big baby" run to his mother—in the extreme case as old as five or six—when the women return from gathering, to throw himself into her lap and take the breast, but the other children are likely to tease him about it, and the breastfeeding eventually ends. Weaning marks the end of infancy." (Howell 2010: 28).

Móŋgàì did not seem to trouble herself with the fact that she is no longer the youngest one. She did not seem to be jealous or require constant attention of her mother. She was that type of a person who liked to engage in individual play, but always in close proximity to her mum – she would follow her everywhere. This seemed not to pose a problem for her mother *Àlèpòsíní* at first.

However, one day, *Àlèpòsíní* wanted to go for a long gathering trip just with few other women. *Móŋgàì* wanted to go as well. Mother said to her that she can come, but she is not going to hold her. She warned her as well that she is too small yet to go that far. However, *Móŋgàì* got very upset and threw objects at her. *Àlèpòsíní* firstly threatened to beat her. But other women had different idea. Seeing this, *Sɔ̀pɔ̀, Móŋgàì's* grandma, came closer to *Àlèpòsíní* and tried to get on her back saying:

Àmɛ́	***dwé***	***nà***	***búnɛ́.***
1SG	go.SUBJ	with	2PL

'I go with you!'

Bɔ̀sá	***mɛ́!***
take.IMP	1SG

'Take me!'

This caused hilarity in the camp. *Àlèpòsíní* began laughing wildly and walked around the camp with the grandma on her back. *Móŋgàì* started to laugh as well and did not demand her mother to take her anymore. *Sɔ̀pɔ̀*'s performance resolved many issues at once. She facilitated understanding in *Móŋgàì*. The mother would not be effective in getting food if she has too much weight on her back. This was also a metaphoric expression that *Móŋgàì* should not be held anymore, because she is already too big for that. At the same time, grandmother prevented the mother from scolding and aggressive responses to *Móŋgàì's* demands and improved general atmosphere in the camp.

After weaning, children are expected to become gradually independent from adults. The manifestation of their independence is based on spending more time in the children groups. This transition period can be very difficult for some children, and the atmosphere in children groups can be harsh – there is no mother's or father's protection anymore. Some children prefer to stay in close proximity of

mother, but she usually has another toddler. This means that the intimacy diminishes. Mbendjele women refer to this period in child's development as very difficult. Nonetheless, they are not trying to promote dependent behaviour in these children.

Endicott and Endicott (2014: 111) report promoting independency in Batek children by not heeding every single cry and letting children to deal with their problems and frustrations. In these situations, Mbendjele women tend to employ *mòádʒò*. Importantly, it is not only child's dependence which is a subject of ridicule. Mothers who show too much dependency on their children are also ridiculed or criticised. In an Mbendjele view, dependency creates problems. In-dependency in one's actions and emotional independency is a highly valued feature (Draper & Keith 1992).

Non-sharing

Demand sharing is an Mbendjele everyday practice. It is, however, a complex skill, which needs to be learned. Children's refusals to share and hoarding were the most frequent issues addressed through *mòádʒò*. These issues were related also to the cases of specific attachment of children to their little possessions, refusals to share with (younger) siblings, or even displaying improper emotions, such as being huffy, when sharing.

Bòkátá, Àɸélà's son, was weaned too early. At least, that were commentaries of elderly women, in reference to his fussy behaviours and frequent crying. He was also one of those children who were considered as "too small", as Mbendjele refer to children whose breastfeeding ceased before it should be ceased.

One morning, men already left to collect their palm wine and palm nuts. Women and children decided that we should stay a little longer, and that I should cook some rice for everyone. Women chatted and did their hair, weaned children were playing nearby. *Àɸélà* had her latest baby (my *móló* child *Daša*) on her lap and played with her. *Daša* was at the developmental stage of *kílí-kílí* – she was grabbing objects, which were laying nearby and put them in her mouth.

Bòkátá, somewhat lost, did not do anything special. He stayed alone in the hut and played with *kamìjónì*. But soon he got bored and went to sit next to his mother, grasping her t-shirt, holding firmly to her. He brought with him also his *kamìjónì*, but did not pay too much attention to it anymore. *Daša* spotted the toy and tried to grab it herself, but she could not reach. So *Àɸélà* told to *Bòkátá*:

Bɛ̀ká ***nà*** ***yɛ́!***
give.PRS to 3SG
'Give it to him!'

Bòkátá was quiet and pretended not to hear anything. *Àɸélà* repeated her demand several times, but *Bòkátá* did not follow. Eventually, *Àɸélà* grabbed the toy herself and gave it to *Daša*.

But *Bòkátá* got upset and took the toy from *Daša's* hands – *Daša* started to cry. *Àɸélà* told *Bòkátá* to leave. *Mbúmà,* sitting behind *Àɸélà,* stood up and took the toy herself and scolded *Bòkátá*. He began to cry as well. She immediately began to mimic *Bòkátá's* crying, while *Àɸélà's* sister *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́* took the toy and began to fight over who is going to take it. *Àɸélà's* anger stopped. *Bòkátá* did not stop crying, but tried to take his toy. Seeing he is not going to win the toy, he retreated to the hut and continued to cry.

There are indications that mocking can have a special role in inculcation of values of sharing. Crittenden offers an example when the Hadza child was humiliated and joked about after refusing to share with the younger sibling (2016: 66) and Schieffelin has also shown that Kaluli tease to teach sharing (1995: 170).

Children often react in an inappropriate way to these performances. For example, they show signs of aggression. These sorts of children's reactions are refered to in terms of their "un-ripeness" (*búdì*), immaturity. These behaviours are also laughed at, thus, such children are mocked twice – through *mòádʒò* and later for their inappropriate reaction to *mòádʒò*.

Interactions with Non-Mbendjele

Lewis (2002: 229–232) described four most common strategies Mbendjele employ to extract goods from Bilo: treatments in terms of friendship, using pity, using flattery or shame, or taking things in need. Unlike Mbendjele, Bilo parents expect deference of children. Children, from Bilo point of view, should strictly follow parent's orders, and must show respect for the elders. Thus, if an Mbendjele child acts with Bilo in terms friendship, flattery, or shame, it would be rude. Moreover, as discussed in the chapter of *mòsámbò,* Mbendjele discourage children in taking or stealing goods from Bilo – children are not skilled yet in taking and stealing without being caught.

The required behaviour that Mbendjele parents promote their children in interactions with Bilo best fits the strategy of evoking pity. Children were instructed to avoid eye-contact, lower their heads, shrink their postures, and to agree with most of what Bilo say. Mbendjele refer to these acts of deference by the term *"kámwá"*, which means both to agree and to be surprised. An Mbendjele child should respond to Bilo by showing agreement:

Oui, patron!
'Yes, patron!'

Merci, papa!
'Thank you, papa!'

C'est ça!
'It's like that!'

By showing deference and humility Bilo can feel more superior, which consequently make him more obliged to give goods. These conventions of how to behave to Bilo are also consistent with Hewlett's (1991b: 29) depiction of general practices of Aka Pygmies while in the village environment: *"they walk slowly, say little, seldom smile, and try to avoid eye contact wit others."*. The example which follows illustrates how was *mòádʒò* employed as a response to child's undesirable behaviour to Milo:

It was an early morning, when a Milo came to the house of an Mbendjele family of *Màbótá*. The mother was about to leave fishing with other women. Milo asked *Màbótá* to go hunting for him. Youngest son *Ànísè* just stood there and stared at Milo, as if he were upset with him. Milo noticed how he stares at him and asked him in Yaka:

Àpɛ́	***dwá***	***té***	***ó***	***lékòlì?***
2SG	PRS		to	school[FR:école]

'Shouldn't you be at the school?'

But *Ànísè* didn't say a word and continued to stare. Mother poked him and whispered:

Kámwá!	***Kámwá!***
agree.IMP	agree.IMP

'Agree! Agree!'

But *Ànísè* just stared. Milo shook his head in disbelief and left with *Ànísè's* father. Women were grabbing their baskets to leave soon. *Ànísè* said:

Àmɛ́	***dwé***	***nà***	***búnɛ́!***
1SG	go.SUBJ	with	2PL

'I go with you!'

Àmɛ́	***yá***	***ó***	***mbúsà!***
1SG	come.PRS	<	after

'I will come afterwards.'

But his grandmother turned around and began to stare at him. *Ànísè* did not understand what was going on and switched looks between the grandmother and other women. At that point, other children who were about to leave fishing with the women laughed and pointed at *Ànísè:*

ʃùlá,	***Ànísè!***
look.IMP	male.name

'Look at Ànísè!'

All women just stared. Then *Ànísè's* mother turned to the grandma: *"Kámwá! Kámwá!"* But the grandmother continued to stare at *Ànísè*. Other women repeated: *"Kámwá! Kámwá!"* Then, all of a sudden, everybody began to laugh.

This example shows how *mòádʒò* can be employed to teach children about appropriate ways of interacting with Bilo. Staring and silence are not signs of humility that are required from Mbendjele children in interactions with Bilo. While in this case *Ànísè's* behaviour was not followed by further negative consequences, such actions can provoke Bilo punishment.

These *mòádʒò* do not necessarily involve full attention of all people present. The attention of the child in target and other children plays more importance. Adults shame children in front of other children. This can be understood as more powerful means of wisdom sharing, as children have tendencies to value opinions of children more than those of the adults:

> "A child's goal is not to become a successful adult; any more than a prisoner's goal is to become a successful guard. A child's goal is to be a successful child. [...] Children are not incompetent members of adults' society; they are competent members of their own society, which has its own standards and its own culture." (Harris cited in Hirschfeld 2002: 615).

> One woman came over to visit *Mbúmà.* She was seeking help to treat her issues with potential *è-kóndʒì*. We were camping in the forest. Men were away working, so there were only women and children in the camp. This woman came with her child, a girl of about three years old. After a brief exchange of news, *Mbúmà* suggested her to speak "between the four eyes"[18]. And so they left to the forest, but the woman left the baby with us. As soon as the mother left, the baby started to cry. Firstly, women tried to sooth her by singing at her loudly, but it didn't help.

> I wanted to be of some help, so I approached the baby, and mimicked what other women did. But the baby was obviously scared of me and cried even more loudly. And so, *Mòsáŋgì* started a *mòádʒò*. She came closer to me and suggested to sooth her as if she was the baby. She lay in my lap and I began to tap her arm rhythmically while trying to yodel as the Mbendjele women do. *Mòsáŋgì* was crying and screaming, and repeatedly looked at the baby.

> She stopped crying and just stared with a surprised look. Soon, *Mbúmà* and the mother returned. *Mòsáŋgì* did not hesitate and recounted on what had

[18] Lewis (2009: 241) defines this speech as follows: "This type of speech is the preferred style for communicating sensitive, secret, personal and profound subjects. It only occurs between two people. Such speech characteristically occurs in the forest and is whispered or muttered using a low tone of voice and monotone pronunciation. As the subject becomes more and more personal or sensitive speakers tend to omit consonants, leaving only tone and vowels, and multiple possible meanings, so that even if overheard it is very difficult to understand what has been said."

happened. The mother found it extremely funny and started another *mòádʒò* herself. And so she came to me, lay in my lap and cried. All women were laughing wildly and switched their looks from the mother to the baby and back. When the mother had finished her performance, she went to the baby and told her:

Mè-ndélé -	***bɛ́nɛ́***	***bà-dìɛ́***	***bìɛ́n.***
4-white.person	3PL	3PL-be.PRS	good[FR:bien]

'White people - they are good!'

She pointed at me, grabbed the baby's hand (with palm-upwards as if begging) and further explained:

Òfɛ́	***fɔ́fá***	***nà***	***ní:***	***"Kàb-á***	***(à)mɛ́***	***mù-ŋgwá!"***
2SG	talk.PRS	with	3SG	share-PRS	1SG	3-salt[LG:mungwa]

'You talk to her: "Give me salt!"'

This suggests that Mbendjele are taught in proper and improper ways of interactions with Non-Mbendjele and strangers. In previous chapters, I have described Mbendjele-Bilo relationships in Djoubé as well as in what contexts adults use *mòsámbò* in children's interactions with Bilo. *Mòsámbò* is used to discuss children's dangerous behaviour, which can have negative consequences on the livelihood of the group. *Mòádʒò* is to mock children's *silly,* less dangerous behaviours in interactions with Bilo.

Discussion

In this chapter, I have portrayed the diversity of forms and richness of applications of *mòádʒò* in an Mbendjele society by both children and adults. Mocking by imitating others is one of the basic features of Mbendjele sense of humour – and they like to use it in flexible ways to resolve conflicts, manage tensions in the camp, strengthen coalitions, (re)assert group's values, and 'share wisdom' by giving feedback to wrongdoers. *Mòádʒò*, however, differs from other forms of joking, teasing, and ridicule by its specific formal requirements – in order to define joking, teasing, or ridicule as *mòádʒò*, it should involve theatricality, pantomime, mimicry, and often exaggeration, too. Females as performers are not necessarily a requirement, as men can do *mòádʒò*, too, even thought, females engage in it more frequently.

Mòádʒò is (pro)egalitarian. *Mòádʒò* is egalitarian in a sense that practically anyone can perform it as well as to leave the performance at any time. There is no hierarchy between the performer and the audience. Audience can switch their roles and join the performance, too. Not all present need to agree with the act of performance and no one is forced to respond to the re-enactments.

The institution of *mòádʒò* promotes egalitarian values by reminding people about their silly, inappropriate or non-normative actions. In contrast with gossip, (harsh) criticism, disputes, fights, or ostracism, *mòádʒò* works not only towards reminding people about the others' wrongdoings. Because of the widely held belief of noise, it is also an event of bonding. Open criticisms, disputes, and fights are unpleasant noises that consequently bring unfortunateness to people – they should be avoided or ceased. Softened by humour, *mòádʒò* does not create noise – it produces laughter – and settle disagreements and tensions at the same time. In the line of this argument, Leonard (1997) made an important observation amongst the Baka: *"The prolonged noises of a dispute are offensive to the forest. For this reason, they often use jokes and ridicules to communicate or settle their disagreements."* (ibid: 12). *Mòádʒò*, thus, is a "clever" way to settle tensions and maintain egalitarian relations.

Mòádʒò makes the relations going. Similar to *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò* also cannot be isolated from its social context and concerns intra and intergroup relations. *Normative*

mòádʒò concerns silliness of individuals' behaviours and releases tensions in the group that were impacted by the individual's actions. *Coalitionary mòádʒò* bonds and strengthens relationships through collective sharing of opinions and views. As was seen in the example about Milo-chimpanzee's death, in some cases, bonding extends from female groups to males, too. *Sexual/political mòádʒò* concerns gender stereotypes, gender identity and egalitarian dynamics of relations between males and females.

Mòádʒò and emotions. As claimed by Quinn, child-rearing "lessons" that are "emotionally aroused", whether positively by praise, or negatively by shaming, are more powerful in teaching and more memorable by children, as they are: *"highly motivated to enact lessons learned in the context of emotional arousal; they remember these lessons well and, remember- ing them in all their arousing, motivating fullness, they keep on re-enacting them."* (Quinn 2005: 481). While *mòsámbò* and *mòádʒò* both concern normative issues, what is different in *mòádʒò* is not only the way it is communicated, but also its *appeal on one's emotions.* While *mòsámbò* is often emotional in a way that it pleads – makes emotional appeal to others and their actions and explicitly states what its wrong and remarks on the consequences of its wrongness, often, *mòádʒò* seems to target the *emotions* themselves.

By this I mean, the package of ridicule and the provocative nature of seeing one self's actions performed in front of his/her eyes can confer different type of self-transcendence in people. In *mòádʒò* which is targeted on children's behaviour it is even more powerful, as the actors often face the child directly, in contrast with the adult-to adult *mòádʒò* where the actors avoid eye-contact with the wrong-doer. But this avoidance seems as avoidance to stare rather as the discerning of the targets realisation is essential as at that time the performance should be ceased.

Lorna Marshall observed that joking relationships of !Kung also focus on the *emotions*:

> "Men and women who have the joking relationship insult each other in a facetious way and also point out actual faults or remark on actual episodes which embarrass a person. Everyone joins in the uproarious, derisive laughter. All this is joking and one should not take offence. The /Kung say this teaches young persons to keep their tempers." (Marshall 1997: 235–236).

Despite the fact that *mòádʒò* mocks particular types of misbehaviours in both adults and children, it seems that *mòádʒò's* goal is also to ripen people in terms of *displays* of emotions. This was seen in the example, where *Bémbà's* crying was mercilessly imitated by adult women, but by children, too. It is about learning the ability to accept shaming, as well as learning to take oneself not too seriously.

Adults' mòádʒò – What do children learn? Psychological research of pedagogy suggests that children easily learn by over-hearing (Correa-Chavez & Rogoff 2009; Jaswal & Markman 2001; Tomasello & Barton 1994). Even though most of the adult *mòádʒò* performances are to address adults' (mis)behaviours, these also create opportunities for children to learn-by-observation – by their presence. They are not excluded from such events. Children are free to watch and observe adult women's behaviour. Repeated exposure to such events enhances children's abilities to extract not only what the "lesson", the targeted issue, but to obtain understanding of the form and style of the performances as well as expected reactions of the audience. As was seen in the ethnographic example of *gender-competition mòádʒò* above, the child was even asked to participate in the performance. He was instructed twice to pretend to cry while the father was trying to make love to the mother. Such events create opportunities for children to learn about participation in *mòádʒò* in coordination with other performers.

Various forms of teasing, mocking, and ridicule are essential to Mbendjele sense of humour. Babies are exposed to such events since early. Mbendjele women affectionately mock new-borns and their behaviours. It is unlikely that children would be able to grasp the meaning of *mòádʒò* that address men's sexuality, however, the issues of sharing can potentially be understood – such as the performance of *Àɸélà* and her possessiveness to machete or *Bòkátá* refusal to share toy with *Daša*.

Sanctioning or 'wisdom sharing'? In hunter-gatherer societies without hierarchies, ridicule was observed to be employed to enforce norms without losing the "transgressor", often member of the family group, as it would be in case of harsher "punishment" of ostracism

Kline (2015) compiled a review of types of teaching an attempt to develop a comprehensive definition of teaching. One of the type of teaching – as she proposes – is "teaching by evaluative feedback", where adults *"encourage or discourage a broad*

range of behaviors in children" (ibid: 10). This includes, for example scolding, open criticism, teasing, and shaming. Jacquet (2015), in response to Kline, criticized that the line between teaching and punishment is a "grey area of study", suggesting that: *"Perhaps something can be called teaching when the degree of active evaluative feedback/punishment inflicted on the pupil/victim is less for a naïve subject than it would be for other members of the society that showed the same misbehavior."* (Jacquet 2015: 27).

From the Mbendjele child's perspective – if not understanding the goal and nature of *mòádʒò* – it can be understood as a punishment. However, the example of *Móŋgàì*, *Àlèpòsíní*, and *Sɔ̀pɔ̀* shows why *mòádʒò* highlights cooperation over punishment. *Àlèpòsíní* was upset and was about to punish *Móŋgàì*. *Sɔ̀pɔ̀*'s reaction and her *mòádʒò* shows the cooperative teaching action. As Kline (2015: 60) responded to Jacquet: *"benefit to the teacher is indirect, derived from benefits to the pupil."*

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As it cannot be clear whether the actors are simply ridiculing and shaming someone because they enjoy doing so, and the same was seen as difficult in case of *mòsámbò* as to whether the speaker just seeks catharsis. However, taking my informants' claims seriously in that *mòádʒò* is a desirable context for promoting people's ripening, it seems that *mòádʒò* concerns mainly emotional ripeness and promotes independency in children, cultivates individual originality and teaches children about being themselves, not "attached' to their mothers.

8 MÀSSÁNÀ

This chapter aims to illustrate how *màssánà* promotes children's ripening by looking at various forms of adult-children interactions within these playful contexts. The structure of this chapter differs from *Mòsámbò* and *Mòádʒò*. I will firstly describe how Mbendjele adults share wisdoms of *màssánà* with children – what is the nature of adults' encouragements for children to participate as well as how they highlight importance and power of *màssánà*. The second part illuminates on some children's structured games and discusses their potency in the inculcation of specific values and skills.

Describing Màssánà

There are many forms of Mbendjele *màssánà* and a short and straightforward definition is difficult to offer. While in Western cultures we tend to distinguish "types of play", Mbendjele have one word, that embraces these "types of play", but also extends to other activities, such as structured games, parent-infant play, musicking, dancing, singing, and *mòkóndì màssánà*– ritual events/ceremonies (Lewis 2013: 45). Pygmies have been described as a *"society of intense leisure"* (Heymer 1980: 200), and even working activities, such as gathering involves playfulness. Mbendjele refer to the activity of playing by verb *"bò-sàná"* and to the game or play by noun *"mà-ssánà"*.

The expression of *"màssánà"* is employed also in contexts that are not necessarily *màssánà per se*. As Table 30 illustrates, Mbendjele sayings that contain the expression of *"màssánà"* are associated with nearly anything "good" and "joyful".

Table 30 Some Mbendjele sayings containing the expression of *màssánà*

"Màssánà mò éná mèndɔ́."*	*"Màssánà cuts problems."* – Helps in resolving problems, also by one's forgetting, "cutting away" from these problems. *Earlier in this thesis I have presented the significance of the metaphors of "cutting" and "tying" (see Chapter 5 on Mbendjele Life-Cycle).
"Mwémà wámú à mpìá nà màssánà."	*"My heart takes on màssánà."* I am happy; my heart is joyful / sings / plays.
"Màssánà à sùngá nà màwà."	*"Màssánà helps with sadness."* In the context of a loss of someone close.
"Bɛ́nɛ́ bà tí ébá màssánà màŋgúsú."	*"They don't know our màssánà."* They don't know our ways, e.g. about Mbendjele from different localities.
"Màssánà mà mpàndʒà àkɔ̀ná."	*"Màssánà sponges off illnesses / tiredness."*
"Màssánà à mù dwá!"	*"Màssánà has gone."* The fun is over – for instance, as a reaction to a sudden presence of Bilo or new labour requests.
"À dìɛ́ ndéŋgé mɔ̀tí nà màssánà – à dìɛ́ vré / wɔ̀té nà bwàŋìà té." *"Màssánà à kòká bwàŋìà támbí!"*	*"She/He/It is the same way as the màssánà is – real/ with no lies."* When something or somebody does not pretend or lie. *"Màssánà cannot lie."*. Implying that *màssánà* is real. It is impossible to lie within *màssánà*.

These examples suggest that *"màssánà"* is associated with goodness and joyfulness. The only negative connotation of *"màssánà"* that I have encountered with is related to manipulative behaviours such as *"playing someone fool."* However, such expressions do not contain the expression of *"màssánà"* in strict sense, but derivations of the general verb for playing *"bò-sàná"* (*"Ò tí sàné námú!"; "Stop playing with me!"*).

In a society where religion is based on play, closer analysis of sharing wisdoms of importance of *màssánà* is needed. The following section discusses how Mbendjele adults highlight the importance of *màssánà* to their children.

Spirits are children, too

Throughout this thesis, I have mentioned several times that women have their own signature ritual called *Íŋgòkú. Íŋgòkú* celebrates feminity and fecundity, women speak about it/her with glee and pride. Entering *Íŋgòkú* is one of the most important steps towards Mbendjele girls' ripeness. Initiation to these rituals can start in middle childhood and continues throughout adolescence. However, it is a life-long process, and as people mature they get to understand certain issues that were not possible when children were yet too unripe.

> On one occasion, the forest spirit of *Íŋgòkú* took on a form of a child. It was during a commemoration ceremony of *Mbúmà's* mother, who passed away before my arrival in Djoubé. During this *mòkóndì màssánà* event, women talked to *Íŋgòkú* in motherese. They remarked how beautiful and delicious she is; that her head smells as beautifully as the child's; they shouted how they would give her all the breast milk of the world; how they would caress and stroke and hug her; how they would give her love, and yodelled back to her when she cried. Young girls were present, too and adult women repeatedly encouraged them to talk to *Íŋgòkú* child.
>
> This was the first and the last time that I had seen that *Íŋgòkú* forest spirit to take a form of child. After this commemoration ceremony, I found a chance to speak with *Mbúmà* in privacy. I didn't ask anything, just remarked that I was surprised to see that *Íŋgòkú* is a child. She laughed and remarked:

Bá-nà	***bà-ítò***	***bàŋgúsú –***	***bɛ́nɛ́***	***bà-kìlá***	***Íŋgòkú.***
2-child	2-woman	1PL.POSS	3PL	3PL-refuse.PRS	female.spirit

'Our children-girls – they refuse Íŋgòkú.'

Mò-ndɔ́	***nà***	***bɛ́nɛ́***	***bà***	***tí***	***ébá***	***yɛ́!***
3-issue	for	3PL	3PL	NEG	know.PRS	3SG

'It is because they do not know Íŋgòkú.'

Ndé	***búsɛ́***	***yángá-ká***	***mò-nà***	***Íŋgòkú****
so	1PL	call-PRF	1-child	female.spirit

bó	***bá-nà***	***bà-tàlɛ́***	***Íŋgòkú.***
that	2-child	3PL-see.SUBJ	female.spirit

'So we have called child Íŋgòkú so that the children would see her.'

* it is not clear as to whether *Mbúmà* meant *Íŋgòkú's* child, or *Íŋgòkú* being a child.

Bó	***bɛ́nɛ́***	***bà***	***mpìɛ́***	***mò-súkú:***
so.that	3PL	3PL	touch.SUBJ	3-head

Íŋgòkú	***y-à***	***dìɛ́***	***è-ssɛ́ngò!***
7.female.spirit	3SG	be.PRS	7-joy

'So that they would realise that Íŋgòkú is a joy!'

Íŋgòkú	***y-à***	***dìɛ́***	***è-nìɛ̀!***
7.female.spirit	7-3SG	be.PRS	7-beautiful

'Íŋgòkú is a beautiful!'

Íŋgòkú	***y-à***	***dìɛ́***	***nà***	***mò-ɲɔ̀ŋgɔ̀!***
7.female.spirit	7-3SG	be.PRS	with	3-delicacy

'Íŋgòkú is delicious!'

Íŋgòkú	***à-kàbá***	***bò-ɲɔ̀ŋgɔ̀***	***nà***	***bá-nà***	***tú.***
female.spirit	3SG-share.PRS	14-deliciousness	to	2-child	all[FR:tout]

'Íŋgòkú shares deliciousness with all children.'

Íŋgòkú	***à***	***ndìngá***	***bá-nà***	***b-íké,***	***b-íké!***
female.spirit	3SG	like.PRS	2-child	2-a.lot	2-a.lot

'Íŋgòkú loves children a lot, a lot!'

Íŋgòkú	***à***	***ndìngɛ́***	***bá-nà***	***bà-tàlɛ́***	***yɛ́!***
female.spirit	3SG	like.SUBJ	2-child	3PL-see.SUBJ	3SG

'Íŋgòkú wants that children would see her!'

This conversation with *Mbúmà* made me realise that adult women were concerned about young girls and their (mis)understanding of *Íŋgòkú*. They decided to call an *Íŋgòkú* child to avoid and resolve these misunderstandings. As *Mbúmà* explained – in order to understand *Íŋgòkú*, it/she must be "seen". By calling *Íŋgòkú('s*) child, or *Íŋgòkú* child, women wanted to familiarise children-girls with the spirit and share wisdoms of its goodness. They had shown them that, after all, *Íŋgòkú* is also a child – a good, innocent being that needs love. Women had shown girls that *Íŋgòkú* is not to be scared of,

because *Íŋgòkú* also loves children, as Mbendjele, and beings do. Presenting *Íŋgòkú* as a child emboldened girls' experience with this forest spirit.

While this example encourages for seeing and knowing the spirit, there are other examples that are to produce respect, and even a fear in children. Forest spirits often produce what sounds as a voice of a crying child, and some spirits are believed to wonder through the forest and take those children who walk through the forest alone – as for instance, Bakoya have *"Djundju" "who cries and steals children who wander in forest"* (Soengas López 2009: 195).

Physical and life-and-death impacts of màssánà

It was after over a year in the field when *Mbúmà* made me feel that I still don't understand what *màssánà* really is about. We were fishing all day and we walked very far – I was exhausted, hungry, and agitated. When we were only about thirty minutes walking distance from the camp and I could not think about anything else just to arrive and relax. But *Mbúmà* said that we should stop for more *kɔ̀kɔ̀* and firewood (*kɔ́nì*) for that night's *màssánà*. I could not help myself and started to cry. I said that I don't want another *màssánà*, that I had enough, that they do *màssánà* all the time and that I am exhausted, and my body is weak already to do any *màssánà* that night. She looked at me with disbelief:

Mò-nà,	***vrémó***	***òɸé —***	***mò-súkú***	***àngóɸé***	***à-pɔ̀lánɛ́!***
1-child	really[FR:vraiment]	2SG	3-head	2SG.POSS	3SG-empty

'Child, really – your head is empty!'

Tálá	***mà-kóló***	***m-ámù!***	***(À)mɛ́***	***dìɛ́***	***nà***	***ndʒò***	***à-kɔ́ná***	***mpé!***
look.IMP	6-leg	6-1SG.POSS	1SG	be.PRS	with	5.body	3SG-tired	too

'Look at my legs! My body is weak, too!'

Mà-ssánà	***à***	***dìɛ́***	***ndɛ́ŋgɛ́***	***mɔ̀tí***	***nà***	***bwàngà –***
6-play	3SG	be.PRS	5.way	one	with	medicine

à	***kàbá***	***búdì***	***mù***	***ndʒò.***
3SG	Share.PRS	9.hardness	to	5.body

'Màssánà is the same way as a medicine – it gives strength to the body!'

Mpìá	***mà-ssánà***	***bìɛ́n,***	***búsɛ́***	***tú***	***bà-mpìá***	***mà-ssánà.***
take.PRS	6-play	well[FR:bien]	1PL	all[FR:tout]	3PL-take.PRS	6-play

'Participate well in the màssánà, we all will participate.'

Mpìá	***bìɛ́n!***	***Nà***	***kɛ́lɛ́***	***òɸɛ́***	***tálé***	***bó***
participate.PRS	well[FR:bien]	<	tomorrow	2SG	see.SUBJ	that

à-kɔ́ná	***àŋgóɸé***	***à-sìá***
3SG-tired	2SG.POSS	3SG-end.PRS

'Participate well and tomorrow you would see that tiredness will be over!'

Mbúmà made me realise that if I really don't try my best in *màssánà*, then I should not expect it to be enjoyable and no doubt that I will feel tired. It is a hard work, but once you lose yourself in *màssánà,* you feel highly energised and do not feel the pain.

On a different occasion, I had a chance to convince myself about *màssánà*'s role in healing. This example is of different kind of *màssánà* – but the role of playfulness here was important, too. We walked through the forest for several hours. Some children began to whimper and complain about pain in their feet. As a response, adult women synchronised their steps, and with each step clasped clasped their hands, while exclaiming one syllable of the following phrase *'bú-sɛ́-mú-yà':*

búsɛ́	***mú***	***yà***
1PL	PRS	arrive

'we are arriving'

Children were encouraged to clasp their hands as well. While repeating this phrase, some adult women were shouting: *"The end! It is over!"* Even though we were still about four kilometres from our destination. Turnbull remarked that for the Mbuti, singing and dancing is like a nourishment for the soul, just the same as food is for the body, and that Mbuti value these two needs as equally important (Turnbull 1985: 9). Even though we were still about four kilometres from our destination, children stopped whimpering and continued on walking playfully – with their "souls" nourished by singing. This sort of *màssánà* helped children in forgetting their pain and we arrived in the camp without unwanted children's crying.

However, *màssánà* can go further than just make feel people healthier and stronger by "fueling their souls". The following presents an ethnographic vignette about an incident that occurred once in the forest camp close to Djoubé. This example illustrates that doing or not doing *màssánà* can be a life-and-death decision:

> We were camping with *Mbúmà's* family, *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá's* family from Bangui-Motaba and we had visitors, too. Parents of *Bɔ̀kɔ̀bá* – *Mònáná* and *Gámbá* – who originally come from Bangui-Motaba, but lately lived in Thanry Sombo, stayed with us for several weeks. It was just a typical peaceful evening and everyone went to sleep.
>
> Later that night, I have heard that *Gámbá* started to talk loudly across the camp. I thought that that must be some sort of late-night *mòsámbò* and he needs to share something important. After all, I did not know *Gámbá* very well, and did not know what to expect. He was almost all the time joking so I thought that this might be just one of his jokes to tease people by not letting them sleep and laugh out loud if they get upset.
>
> However, nobody said a word or commented on his speech, so it felt somewhat weird. *Gámbá* continued on talking. Sometimes he was rather shouting, sometimes he talked almost in whispers, I could hardly understand anything, as he did not speak in Mbendjee Yaka. Only some sentences were in Yaka and the only thing that I had heard clearly was him repeating: *"Go away!",* and *"Stop!", "Let people be!"*. He was clearly having a conversation with someone or something.
>
> The weirdest part about this night was that nobody said anything to *Gámbá*. It occurs that even in the late night someone would want to speak *mòsámbò*, but if it takes too long, others ask the person to let people sleep. *Gámbá* spoke, shouted, sang, talked, he was clasping his hands, and it looked like he was gesturing and explaining something. When I looked out from my tent, it looked like he was talking to a tree.
>
> In the morning, exhausted, he went to sleep. *Mbúmà* explained that *Gámbá* was working hard all night to resolve a problem that is about to come upon our camp. Only *Gámbá* later told me directly: there was an owl close to our

> camp –s/he came to deliver a message about an upcoming death of a child. He was not allowed to say the name of the child, but that he was talking with the owl to let people be, to go away, and not to kill the child. He said that the owl agreed on a condition that they will do *Bòlúbé màssánà*[19], but emphasised that it must be done very well to save the child's life.
>
> Everyone worked hard to prevent child's death. People forgot about their petty tensions – there was unspoken, but very strong feeling of solidarity and cooperation among people. Given the fact that children are not excluded from such conversations, what emotional and "teaching" impact this incident had? Children were more quiet than usual and prepared thoroughly for the *màssánà* events – they were making their skirts and helped in gathering food. For the next three days, every night we did *Bòlúbé*. *Gámbá* was satisfied and said that these *màssánà* successfully prevented the death.

This incident made me realise about the power and importance of *màssánà*. While maybe a rare example, it had extremely strong impact on children. Nothing else mattered, only working together to prevent the death. This example taught children not only that *màssánà* can save lives, but as *Gámbá* emphasized, it *"needs to be done well".*

As *Màbɔ́tà* explained at the beginning of this thesis, if people hold *màssánà* and children are not participating, he repeatedly encourages children to do so, because it is through *màssánà* that children grow into wisdom, it is *màssánà* that "ties people together". To secure that *màssánà* has such potency, it needs to be done well. The nature of participation and encouragements for participation needs a special attention, as the following section presents.

On participation & feedback

At the beginning of this thesis, I have outlined that people are called for participation by the expression *"mpìá".* In everyday, casual speech, *"mpìá"* can mean to "to take", "to grab", "to touch", or "to hold". (Cloarec-Heiss & Thomas 1978: 49). Kisliuk defines *mpìá*, in her publications *"pia"*, as "to seize" or "to grab" (1998: 220). "To seize" or "to grab" implies as if an individual would be able to "grab" the *màssánà* for him or herself,

[19] *Bòlúbé* is children's spirit play, equivalent to Lewis' *"Bolu"* (2002: 132-136).

as if it could be a possession; and "to seize" suggests as if doing *màssánà* would be a sudden and forcible act. Oxford English Dictionary defines "to seize" as *"to take a possession of by force"* (OED, n.d.). In my observation, *màssánà* cannot be seized, possessed, or grabbed. To define *mpìá* as "to take" as Lewis did, reflects better on the ethnographic reality (2002: 125).

To "take *màssánà*", as observed in my field, does not occur within seconds. It is something to work for. In order to *lose yourself in* and to enter the communitas, the whole community must want and actively engage in working towards the same goal. Such successful *màssánà* can described as beautiful (*ènìɛ̀*), delicious (*mòɲɔ̀ŋgɔ̀*), or for example full/filled up (*málóndɛ́*). Thus, there must be a coordination of the participants, and everyone must want the same. The expressions such as *"mpìá màssánà"* often occur when something is not done to the fullest. It happens when those who do not participate wholly and fully are asked to increase in intensity:

Kàb-á	***nà***	***mà-kíngó***	***m-ábòlé!***
share-PRS	with	6-throat	6-big

'On full throats!'

Mpìá	***nà***	***búdì!***
touch.PRS	with	9.hardness

'Participate with intensity!'

Wɔ̀té	***nà***	***búdì***	***támbí!***	***Bɛ̀k-á!***
there.is.not	with	9.strength	NEG	give-PRS

'Not intensive enough! Give!'

Lɛ́mbá!
sing.PRS
'Sing!'

Bíná!
dance.PRS
'Dance!'

If women and children would for instance stop singing during the forest spirit play and begin to chat, it can almost seem upsetting for spirit guardians whose responsibility is to make sure that ritual goes well, or people mock them: *"Often BaYaka will criticize*

singers who are not singing energetically enough or those who sit apart from others or who are chatting or sleeping." (Lewis 2013: 57).

Dìká	***kílíkílí!***	***Mpìá***	***mà-ssánà!***
stop.PRS	all.over.the.place	participate.PRS	6-play

'Stop being all over the place! Participate in màssánà!'

It is not a novel observation that within the context of singing and dancing events, Yaka encourage others if the contribution is not "full" enough:

> "they may get more frequent advice from elders concerning the particular techniques or dance movements to employ in the given circumstances and sometimes explicit mockery of sloppily performed maneuvers." (Lewis 2016: 150).

> "Duambongo, Lukasi, and some others are getting the dancing roused in anticipation of dikao, walking around the dance area, shouting encouragement, or waving their hands trying to raise the volume of dancing and singing." (Kisliuk 1991: 238).

A typical situation in the camp is that children themselves or on demand or encouragement of adults, organise their *màssánà* evening events. Sometimes, members of the camp ask specifically for certain types of spirit play, or specific songs or games. Adults described that watching children's play, singing, and dancing is pleasing to their eyes:

è-ssέŋgò	***à***	***mpìá***	***mísɔ̀***
7-joy	3SG	touch.PRS	6.eye

'joy touches the eyes'

If toddlers join in the performance – whether attempt to dance, to clasp hands, or hum the melody – they are immediately responded to by lavishing praise, such as is illustrated in Plate 4. Older children are also praised, usually exclaims that what they do is a joy:

è-ssέŋgò	***y-íké!***
7-joy	7-a.lot

'A lot of joy!'

While in most of *mòkóndì màssánà*, children are free in the technique of their dancing performance, if children play the actual forest spirits, can can re-adjust their position, or physically demonstrate, and instruct how to proceed (see Figure 30).

Children's evening *màssánà* typically lasts few hours, but can last till the dawn, often drawing the whole group – including adults – into a *màssánà* mood and so they join in. While performing, adults continue on giving children feedback: they encourage participation of those children who did not join in or they demand more intensive enthusiastic participation of those children who already joined, but did not give their best.

Such *màssánà* events are often a topic for discussion even the following morning– people would talk about children's contribution to the joyful atmosphere in the camp; they would re-enact clumsy moves of younger children; or children in groups would demonstrate newly invented dancing moves – feeling of collectively-achieved solidarity persists.

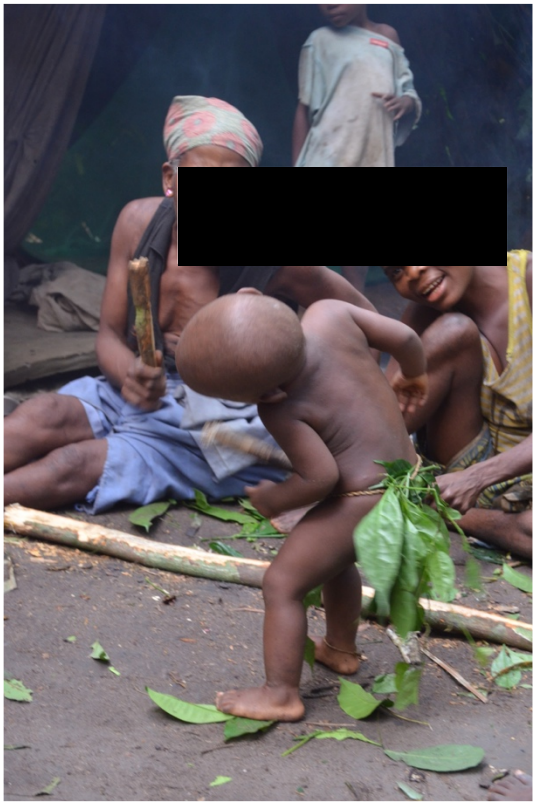

Plate 4 *Bɔ̀télɛ́* and *Mbúmà* lavish *Mòsúkú*

As soon as *Mòsúkú* joined children's *màssánà*, mother *Bɔ̀télɛ́* and grandmother *Mbúmà* encouraged her to continue. They praised her, smiled at her, imitated her dance movements, the mother made her a skirt. *Mòsúkú* engaged in many activities within this *màssánà* — apart from dancing, she was clasping hands and with the help of *Bɔ̀télɛ́,* participated in drumming.

Figure 30 *Mbúmà's* demonstration and instruction of boys in performing *mòkóndì màssánà*

Ìlókó enters Djoubé – Everyone Works towards Ripeness

In his early twenties, a young man from Mombellou (see Figure 2 for a map of the area) caught a new forest spirit *Ìlókó*. Everyone from Djoubé was curious and impatient to see and hear it. People from the *Ɔŋgélɛ́* neighbourhood decided to buy it (see Lewis 2002: 160-169 for detailed description of Yaka economics of *màssánà*). This young man and his mother came from Mombellou and stayed for a week. Thorough instruction and training started. Young man was instructing men, the mother instructed and demonstrated for the women. People danced and singed *Ìlókó*, and took turns in provisioning for those who were participating – to my observation – almost to their exhaustion. Our neighbourhood often seemed empty, as many people went to *Ɔŋgélɛ́* to join in the performance, or just to be there to watch. At the end of the instruction week, there was a big *Ìlókó màssánà* – even Bilo and Mbendjele from Mombellou were present.

Ìlókó overshadowed most of other *màssánà.* We sang it while going yam-digging; children performed it practically every night. Even during casual conversations, some women would begin to hum its melody, and others would immediately join in with clapping and dancing few steps, accompanied with laughter, then returned to the previous conversation. It felt as if *Ìlókó* was everywhere and all the time. If I asked my informants for different *màssánà*, they would either refuse or after a while switch back to *Ìlókó*.

Constant repetition, encouragement for participation of everyone, and ever-presence of *Ìlókó* led every member of the community to master this *màssánà* to minuet details, as well as to perfecting their performance in coordination with each other. Entering into a new *màssánà* is a task for the whole group – at this point, everyone is unripe – and as people become more proficient, tuned, and coordinated, they work together in making *màssánà* as potent as possible in order to bring more joy to people and to the world. Entering a new *màssánà* is like ripening as a group – it puts people into new test – they need to re-learn to cooperate in different, new way, within a framework of a new *màssánà*. In such circumstances, the distinction between child/unripe and adult/ripe is blurred. It is as if everyone was unripe and work collectively to achieve ripeness within this specific *màssánà* context.

Plate 5 Training *Ìlókó*

A casual afternoon in the forest camp. *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* started to sing *Ìlókó*'s signature melody engaged in its typical female dancing style. *Íngòló* (sitting on the yellow container) appointed the rhythm, and *Ànísè* began to dance *mòkóndì* (in *How Humans Ripen* chapter I have remarked on his specialisation in dancing). *Mbúmà* and *Bɔ̀tɛ́lɛ́* watched and commented on the performance (They sit behind the boy eating a piece of yam). This was a training only – not everyone in the camp participated and there was no preparation for this event.

Plate 6 Real *Ìlókó mòkóndì màssánà* event

There was substantial preparation for this event by every member of the community. Both *Ànísè* and the boy who was eating the yam in the picture above, are attempting to give their best. The long-term preparation and training gives fruits. People remark on their performance and if they loosen up on intensity, they encourage them to continue.

Growing up playing

During my fieldwork, I did not observe any ceremonial welcome of the child into the community. However, my informants explained that if there would be any *màssánà* (*Àyàyà*), it would be if twins (*dìyàsà/màpàsà*) were born. Similar views are held by BaKoya Pygmies *"Mawasa"* (Soengas López 2010: 82), and Oloa Biloa also mentions *"Diasa"* (Oloa Biloa 2016) My informants remarked that this *màssánà* would occur the child starts to wallow by him/herself (*ɲìngàɲá*). While there are no *màssánà* to celebrate one's birth, children are exposed to music and dance since in utero (Lewis 2013) and play is ever-present.

Age, gender, and experience are crucial in determining in what ways people engage in forest-spirit ritual actions (Lewis 2002: 124). As is portrayed in Plate 7, young children and those who do not walk yet, are not excluded from these events. On one occasion, during a *mòkóndì màssánà Bòlúbé*, I saw a mother with a newborn who sat close to the women and children, who were singing and dancing to call the spirit from the forest. As soon as the spirit emerged, she re-positioned her baby in the sling-shot, so the baby could see the spirit. She pointed at the *Bòlúbé* and said to the baby: *"My child, Look! Mòkóndì is beautiful!"* (*Mò-nɜ̀̀ àŋgámú tálá! Mòkóndì àdìé ènìè!*). While this newborn baby could not participate to a degree as, for example, a toddler, her presence was acknowledged.

The quality of participation in *mòkóndì màssánà* changes as children mature. For example, Plate 8 portrays a contribution of a boy Djoubé, who was passing through a transition from children's groups to more independent and individual, almost ripened men. In the groups of children, he was acting as "adult" – he coordinated drumming, demonstrated other boys how to prepare *mòkóndì màssánà.* However, in adult forest spirit plays, he was considered as unripe. As can be seen in one of the pictures, he is standing next to the forest spirit controller, observing how to control the forest spirit of *Èdʒéŋgì.*

Even what could be called "work" turns into play easily. While adults do not pressurise children to contribute economically, children often excitingly join adults and participate in subsistence activities. Often, on these occasions, children as a group separates from the adult women and children engage in different activities: climbing trees, chopping

trees, setting them on fire, making animal traps, catching small animals, searching for sweet fruits, building separate camps, fishing, swinging on lianas, searching for nuts. Frequent play in the forest promotes mastering children's survival and subsistence skills, their way-finding and food-finding skills, orienteering, etc.

Children play with various sorts of objects: knives, machetes, axes, baskets and mats, containers – all sorts of objects they see adults utilise. Children make their toys, are ask older one to make for them objects to play with. Often, they imitate adult behaviours by building miniature mongolu huts, boys set the traps, girls breastfeed and take care of their children (see Figure 31).

Figure 31 Cocoa breasts and babies

Children's imitation of adults' daily activities seems to be a universal phenomenon. Playing 'mothers' belong to this category. This photo illustrates two girls, friends, holding cocoas as if they were babies. The girls did not only play mothers by holding the babies. They also breastfed them.

Plate 7 Toddlers and *mòkóndì màssánà*

These two photos are to illustrate that toddlers are not excluded from adult *mòkóndì màssánà*. The first picture was taken in Thanry Sombo during an *Èdʒéŋgì* ceremony. Toddlers are in sling while lure *Èdʒéŋgì*. The second picture was taken in *Kwɔ́nà* camp in Djoubé. *Àɸélà* is performing *Íŋgòkú's* forest spirit, her daughter *Daša* is there and *Dʒánì* is taking care of her while *Àɸélà* takes on the voice of the spirit.

Plate 8 Djoubé – between unripeness and ripeness

Djoubé, boy on each of the photos, was at time of my research the oldest boy in our neighbourhood's children's group. He was going through a transition – soon turning to be a ripe man. While he still spent a lot of time with younger children, as for instance, in the first picture he appoints the rhythm for their *màssánà*, he was joining adult men in their daily activities, as well as spent a lot of time with other adolescent boys from *Ɔŋgélé* and Likombo, and actively began to "labour" for Bilo.

Màssánà Structured Games – Inculcation of Mbendjele distinct values

Apart from joining *màssánà* to simply enjoy doing it – which is important, too – frequent participation in *màssánà*, children's games included, inculcates distinct ways of coordination of individuals, through which different values are instilled. Through frequent participation in structured children's games children take wisdoms not only of how to synchronise, or how to keep polyphony going, but also learn about each other and people's styles in performance. The coordination of individuals needs to be *worked* for – participants need to achieve it. My informants from Bangui-Motaba often remarked on different ways of doing things in Djoubé, including people's singing, dancing, and children's games. On one occasion, I observed a boy from Bangui-Motaba to attempt to join in a game, which was reportedly unique for Djoubé. While he was frequently observing other children play, he knew the lyrics that accompanied the game. However, when he tried to join in *physically,* he failed to catch on the speed with other children. This example highlights the importance of repetition in engaging in such *màssánà* events. To certain extent, the individuals involved in these games must *"get to know each other"*, in order to secure the success. Only through a frequent engagement leads to such highly sophisticated coordination of the voices and the bodies.

In this section I will describe some children's structured games by a focus on what sorts of coordination of individuals is instilled, and what sorts of "wisdoms" are shared. Instead of focusing on *quantity* by examining each of the children's games that I have observed, I chose several ones to explore specific issues relevant to *ripening.* Camille Oloa Biloa (2016) conducted her fieldwork in the village of Bonguinda – not far from Djoubé (see Figure 2 Map of the research area, Likouala, Republic of Congo). She analysed several children's structured games and described what children learn while engaging in them. In my observation, Mbendjele children from Djoubé also played these games. Thus, I chose contexts of only such games that were not described yet.

Ètúndɛ́ nà kɔ̀kɔ̀. *"Ètúndɛ́"* is a mat, which is used for preparing (slicing and cutting) food, for instance *"kɔ̀kɔ̀"* – the *Gnetum* leaves. This game is based on exclaiming in synchrony the phrase *"Ètúndɛ́ nà kɔ̀kɔ̀"*, while breaking them into syllables:
è – tún – dɛ́ – nà – kɔ̀ – kɔ̀; è – tún – dɛ́ – nà – kɔ̀ – kɔ̀; è – tún – dɛ́ – nà – kɔ̀ – kɔ̀; […]

There are unlimited possibilities in how many times and for how long these exclaims can continue. However, at point one person shouts louder than others a single: "*Ètúndɛ́!"* Hearing this exclaim, others respond by shouting: *"Ùè – ùè – ùè – ùè – ùɛ́ɛ́ɛ̀ì!"* And all the children fall on the ground (see Plate 9).

Plate 9 *Ètúndɛ́ nà kɔ̀kɔ̀*

Everybody sings *"Ètúndɛ́ nà kɔ̀kɔ̀"*, but the group of older children jumps while clasping the hands (on the right) and the group of younger kids are holding one child, bouncing him up and down (on the left). With "Ùè – ùè – ùè – ùè – ùɛ́ɛ́ɛ̀ì!" everyone goes on the ground.

Apart from learning to synchronize, both in bodily moves and singing, what seems even more important here is: *Why there isn't "competition" for who is going to be the one who exclaims: "Ètúndɛ́"?*

In such games, within which one actor could potentially have "decisive" power – in this case it is one individual that "decides" when the children fall on the ground, one could expect that there could be a competition about who is going to be "the one". Such conversations in children's groups are very common concerning food. I often followed sharing decisions and practices in children's groups. For example, I would be heating up a large pot of cocoa drink on a fire, while children would sit around and wait. While the cocoa was heating up, they were talking who is going to get the first share. Typical claims were, for example: *"Us, girls!"*, or *"Me, I am the oldest!"*, or *"Us oldest girls first, then younger girls, and only then the boys!"* When the cocoa drink was already warm enough, I would say that it is up to them, not me, how they will share. These instances often ended up with "disorder". The quickest child would grab the pot and run away with it, then when s/he would be far enough, quickly drink as much as possible. Others would chase her/him, take the pot from her/his hands and fight for the pot, spilling half of it on the ground. These are examples of noise and disorder, and adults would encourage them to stop the noise and share properly.

However, I have never seen anything like that during children's games, such as *Ètúndɛ́ nà kɔ̀kɔ̀.* In my view, it can be because of unlimited possibilities of sharing through *màssánà*. In the context of this *màssánà*, children can simply repeat the game, till everyone had "power" to appoint when children should fall on the ground – till everyone gets his/her share. Through both food and *màssánà,* people share joy. However, food is always limited. *Màssánà*, in contrast, can share joy endlessly.

Now I will point to a different version of *"ètúndɛ́ nà kɔ̀kɔ̀"*. This version is also based on repeating exclaims of the phrase of *"ètúndɛ́ nà kɔ̀kɔ̀"* in synchrony. However, with each repetition, participants shout out louder and with increasing speed, while rhythmically beating the ground with their palms, or with other objects è – tún – dɛ́ – nà – kɔ̀ – kɔ̀. The point is to keep up with an increasing speed in beating and singing in synchrony with others.

Practically, *"ètúndɛ́ nà kɔ̀kɔ̀"* is based on a repetition of a single phrase, but the rhythm, style, pace, and melody can be altered. This game has a very flexible structure with endless possibilities for improvisation, alternation, and innovation. *"ètúndɛ́ nà kɔ̀kɔ̀"* does not have formal "beginning" or "ending" and is simple enough to be joined even by younger children. On one occasion, I have seen that during one of the *"ètúndɛ́ nà*

kɔ̀kɔ̀" play, children altered even the phrase *"ètúndɛ́ nà kɔ̀kɔ̀",* seeing that a toddler who did not know how to sing, wanted to join in. They changed it for *ɲà-ɲà-ɲà-ɲà*. The baby was held by one of the participants of the game and everyone sang *to* and *for* the infant, encouraging her to continue in participation.

Pig is on the river bank (Ngwei ezali na libongo). In this game, children stand in queue. In front of the queue, there is a pig, which is taking children – one child facing the queue. This pig jumps from one leg to another and sings: *"Pig is on the bank, takes the children…"* and the children who stand in the row must predict on which leg this pig is going to end up. The point is that entire row of children tries to jump on the leg (mirror). If somebody fails to jump at the proper feet, pig comes and take the child. This game promotes swiftness in reaction and elevates sensations of fear of being caught by the pig. Also, children must be very attentive in trying to predict pig's movements a react quickly.

Màssánà mò máìé. This game is practiced during rain or shortly after the rain. A group of children, adolescents, and adults, too create rows of three-four and run through the village or camp, synchronized in their steps. One of the functions of this game is to beat the soil/earth to make it firm and prevent from creating puddles. This game again promotes learning coordination of synchrony in movements, and singing, too, while holding each other's arms. This can be particularly difficult, as it requires ability to sing while running. In my observation, such game can last several hours. The singing herein is in a call-response way. This sorts of coordination of individual can prepare participants for the male forest spirit play of *Shó* – mentioned in the chapter of *Mòádʒɔ̀* – where such sort of singing and movement coordination of people in rows.

Èlándá. Adolescents and young adults often organise their sexually-potent games, such as *èlándá*. These events often take place in the evenings and can last till dawn. While small children are free to watch, they are usually not participating. In my observation, however, younger children often played *elanda* in their group, exactly the same game with their peers next to the adolescents and adults, while attempting to imitate their moves.

Plate 10 Explaining *èlándá*

There was a funeral of a Milo man. Three days of male spirit ritual (*Èdʒéŋgì*) were held (you can even see some stripes of spirit's raffia laying on the ground). People are exhausted, but very happy. As soon as the rain ceased, lusty atmosphere continued and elanda started.

Plate 10 Explaining *èlándá* (continued)

Plate 10 Explaining *èlándá* (continued)

Discussion

This chapter illustrated how the context of *màssánà* is exploited for people's ripening. Firstly, I have highlighted that the word of *màssánà* has profound positive connotations and is employed in positive and joyful contexts. Secondly, I have presented ethnographic examples to illustrate how adults promote children's understanding of crucial importance of *màssánà.* Since *play and ritual* is central to well-being and happiness of people – since *màssánà* ripens people – I have described the nature of encouragements for participation. Lastly, I have described some children's structured games.

Joint cooperative actions of *màssánà* create opportunities for everyone to take wisdom about importance of participation, and enjoying collaborative "work" in an attempt to achieve joy. My own personal feelings when joining in *màssánà* made me realise this specific feeling of "belonging" and solidarity with others, while feeling being a part of something bigger. *Màssánà* celebrates communal cooperation.

This communality of cooperation can always be justified by the desired outcomes people try to achieve. As I have shown, participating in *màssánà* can heal people and make them stronger. In such extreme case as it was with an owl-messenger of death – participation in *màssánà* can save people's lives. Such emotional appeal can be a very strong "lesson" for the children. It informs that humans are not the only "beings" that co-share and co-live in the forest. It also shares wisdom that these beings have their own intentions, and highlights the importance of cooperation and solidarity at least between humans.

Encouragements for participation can seem to take on a form of "verbal instructions", since people tell other what to do. Importantly, these encouragements are not containing information on *how* people should do it. For example, by exclaiming: *"Sing!",* one is encouraged to join in by singing, but no one explains how. Thus, such types of "verbal instructions", do not violate children's personal and autonomy and promote them to cultivate their own ways of singing, dancing, etc.

The example about *Íŋgòkú* provides insights into the fears of Mbendjele adult women. As *Mbúmà* expressed during our conversation, women were worried about the young

girls' perception on *Íŋgòkú*. Women *chose* to call *Íŋgòkú* child in order to promote understanding that *Íŋgòkú* spirit is as innocent and good as baby is. While this occurred during a commemoration ceremony, women thought about the younger girls, too. They deliberately used the context of *màssánà* for sharing wisdoms of *Íŋgòkú* with younger girls.

The section about how *Ìlókó* entered Djoubé explained that while learning a new *mòkóndì màssánà*, every member of the community is *unripe*. Not children only, but also adults need to learn new dance moves, new lyrics, etc., while at the same time, they need to learn it *in coordination* with others. This involved thorough training first. Then, people prioritised taking the *Ìlókó mòkóndì màssánà* over other forest spirit plays, or different *màssánà* activities altogether. People sang its melody outside of the actual *màssánà* context – such as while digging yams, and danced its specific movements even during the causal conversations. Further, people were explicitly discussing the lyrics of the *Ìlókó* songs, or which dancing parts are less or more difficult. Through entering a new *màssánà* together, every member of the group works towards "ripeness" – ripeness of oneself as well as ripeness of a group, even though one's ways of contribution and participation differs from the other.

All three institutions of mòsámbò, mòádʒò, and *màssánà* are open to everyone. As illustrated in previous chapters, mòsámbò and mòádʒò were employed by children as well. This accounts for all ages and all "types" of *màssánà*. Adults are free to join children's structured games, children are encouraged to participate in adult forest-spirit play, and the games' "rules" can be adjusted so that even the youngest ones could join in.

At the same time, *màssánà* provides a specific framework for those who participate, and to participate in their own ways. This cultivates, respects, and celebrates individual uniqueness. The encouragements for participation described at the beginning of this chapter, show that people do not ask people to do things in specific ways (mokondi *màssánà* can be an exception), but to simply do them. Adults did not say to children to *sing this or that way,* they simply ask them to sing. There is no such thing as people know or do not know how to sing. Yes, they recognise that somebody sings very well ("is with a big throat"), but there is no such thing as "you do not know how to sing".

This also implies that the quality of performance is not what adults emphasise, it is the *very* participation that matters.

Màssánà focuses on cultivation of positively valued behaviours – it does not discuss norm transgressions and peoples' misbehaviour, as can occur through *mòsámbò* or *mòádʒò*. As remarked by Oloa Biloa and Lewis, because *màssánà* requires high cooperation of individuals involved, it can be interrupt or cased if "something bad comes up" or the tensions within the group are not resolved. Primarily, it serves to promote the correct behaviours in children, while highlighting age and gender solidarity.

Based on the analysis above, it seems that this joint cooperation is far more important than what people really do within *màssánà*. By this I mean that adults' attempts to encourage children for participation is far more important then the what ways they participations are. The nature of participation does not matter – it is the intensity and giving one's best by which *màssánà*'s successfulness and potency is "measured".

***

I have discussed ripening potencies of three Mbendjele institutions. The chapter that follows juxtaposes the Mbendjele view of ripening with that of the outsider-imposed institutions, specifically designed for education of Mbendjele children.

9 CONTRASTING "RIPENING" WITH ORA

Mbendjele views on teaching and learning differ from Western conceptions of formal education. As illustrated in previous chapters, Mbendjele children are not seen as parents' "future projects" – children are free to choose when and what they want to learn and there is not such an idea as: *"my children already know this and that and what about yours?"* Looking at these rules and "freedom of learning", implementing Western-inspired schools into Mbendjele culture clashes with the Mbendjele profound understandings of how teaching and learning should be performed. Despite good intentions, foreign educational enforcements for Mbendjele can have negative effects not only on the children, but on the livelihood of the Mbendjele communities as a whole. The overall aim of this chapter is to describe in what ways outsider-imposed schooling system in Djoubé contrasts with the Mbendjele ideal of education- "the ripening" view, as expressed in previous chapters.

Outsider-imposed Education in Congo

Tradition of outsider-imposed education in Congo dates back to the beginnings of French colonisation. Feldmann (2016) described French colonial educational system in terms of three different periods, each pursuing different educational ideologies. The first period (19th century) was based on the ideal of assimilation – the goal was to change the "primitive" into a Frenchman. The second period (from early 20th century until around 1945) was based on "assimilation" – the ideal of "Frenchness" was to be only a way to improve "primitive" lives. During the third period (period of decolonisation) a radical change occurred, when Congolese schools mimicked French formal education. In contrast with the British colonial education policy, French system insisted in teaching in *French* language, not in the languages of local communities – employment of local languages was strictly prohibited. The politics of education in French language was to ascertain domination over colonies and catalyse cultural assimilation. Consequently, French schools in colonial Africa were oftentimes managed by European teachers. These were boarding schools and students were allowed to go home only during the summers (Grier 1999: 319). These schools were very expensive and available only to

the "elites" – firstly available to the chief's son and later to selected youth population (Bokamba 1984: 7).

This "elitism" in access to formal education persisted until 2011, when Congo-Brazzaville became the first country in Africa to promote a specific law for protection of its indigenous population *Law on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Populations in the Republic of Congo* (Act No. 5-2011) (Parliament of Congo 2011). This meant that education was not only for the "elites", but for others, even marginalised groups, such as Yaka Pygmy groups, too.

ORA – "Observe, Think, Do!"

Mbendjele children from Djoubé attend a school especially designed for Yaka. The main idea of this project is the preparation for Congolese state schools, under the name: ORA – (Observer, Reflechir, Agir! / Observe, Think, Do!). The project is financially supported by UNICEF Congo, PAM (Programme Alimentaire Mondial / World Alimentation Program), World Bank, and IPHD (International Partnership for Human Development) (see Bevalot et al. 2015: 62 for further details). The actual "on-ground" organisation of schooling is in charge of ASPC (l'Association des Spiritains au Congo), a Catholic organisation.

Since 2013, forty-five ORA schools were established in the Likouala Department. According to the Country Program Document 2014-2018 by UNICEF, the free ORA education had been offered to 1.5432 children (including 654 girls) in 2009, 2.169 children (including 650 girls) in 2013 (UNICEF 2013: 5) and to 4.253 in 2015 (UNICEF 2015a: 32). By 2018, the increase of 10% pupils is expected (UNICEF 2015a: 33). Advocacy of ORA increased mainly in the Departments of Sangha and Likouala – 4,253 children in 46 ORA schools, with financial support of the government to assist 76 trainers (UNICEF 2015a: 33). Furthermore, the joint European Union, UNICEF, and WFP support for indigenous children's schooling in 2014–2015 in the north of Likouala benefited 2,794 indigenous students in 39 ORA schools (1,263 girls, also see Figure 32). The integration of 246 former ORA students (76 girls) into 14 public schools was monitored (UNICEF 2015a: 35–36).

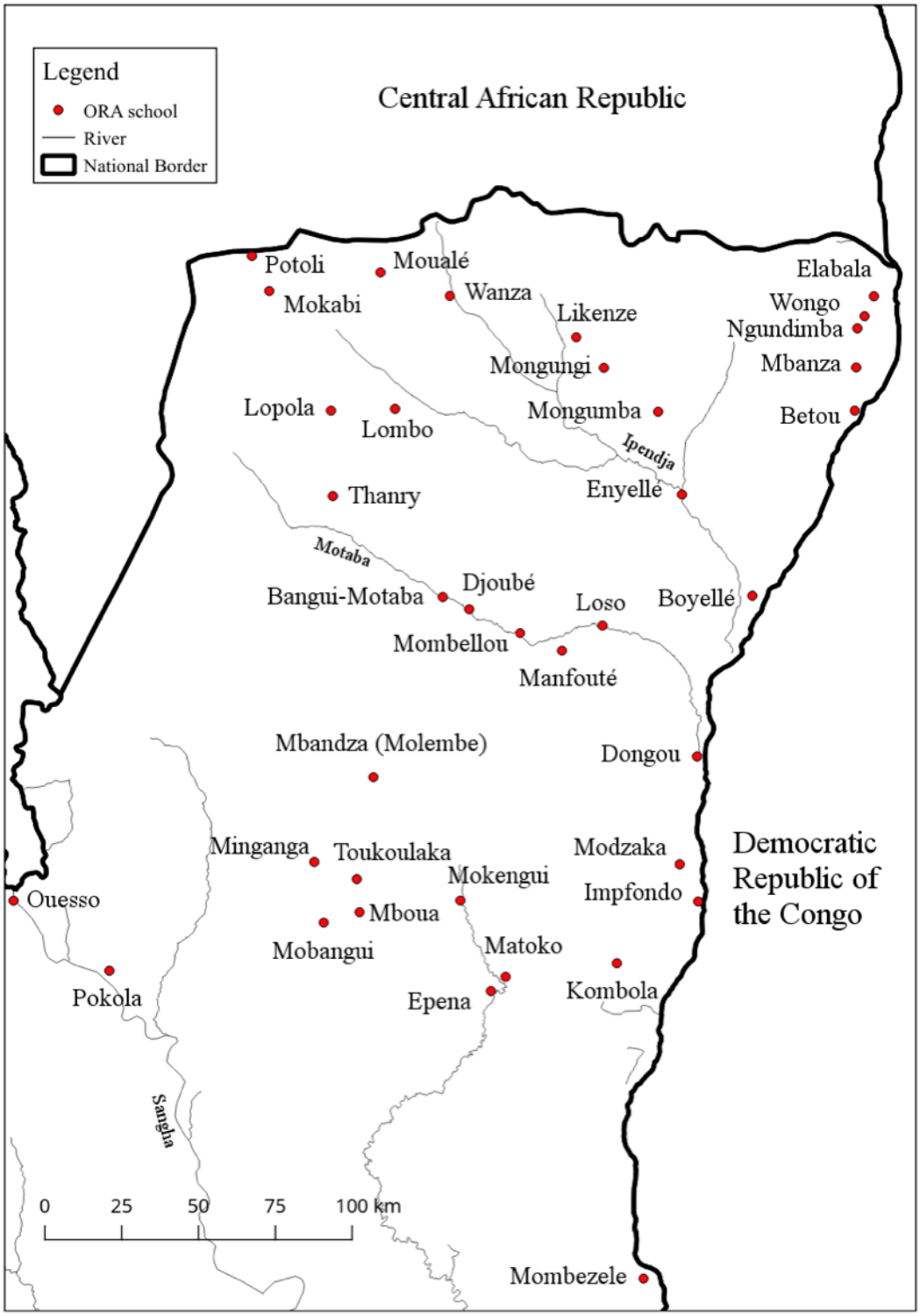

Figure 32 Map of ORA schools in Sangha and Likouala Departments (2015)

Credit: Jean Marie Samuel Ouenabio from UNICEF Congo

ORA pedagogical objective is to teach French language, mathematics and practical issues – for example, hygienic habits – by using active pedagogy methods. Active pedagogy is about creating learning environments, in which pupils are encouraged to active participation. The main goal of ORA is to prepare children for Congolese state schools. There are two basic stages of this preparation: stage ORA 1, and stage ORA 2.

The instruction throughout the ORA 1 should be in a Mbendjé Yaka, and the instructor should be Mbendjele. However, there is lack of Mbendjele ORA teachers, so the teaching is often done by Bilo and in Lingala. ORA 2 is taught in French and children should already have basics of French and writing, acquired in ORA 1. After completing ORA 1, children are sent to the departmental basis of ORA in Impfondo, where ORA 2 is taught. This involves living in the campus. In my observation, children did not learn how to speak French, apart from salutations, which they could possibly hear from their parents already – as for instance, through listening to *mòsámbò*.

Attending the school and staying in the village environment can have great impact on the transmission of Mbendjele subsistence skills and knowledge, because: *"the way in which children invest their time might be critical to understand preferences for the acquisition of different types of knowledge and can therefore potentially help predict changes in the transmission of different bodies of knowledge."* (Sternberg et al 2001 in Gallois et al 2015; see also Morelli et al 2003).

Children were expected to attend the school twenty hours per week, Monday to Friday, 10 months a year. If we predict that children do not miss a day in school (180* 4=720), they will lose 720 hours a year, which they would otherwise spend by learning, playing, experimenting and participating in the forest activities.

ORA Methods and Data-collection

The following discussion is based on participant-observation and interview data. I conducted twelve in-depth interviews with two instructors during 2013/2014 school year in Djoubé. These interviews took place in the village of Djoubé – either after the actual classes, or during frequent visits of the teachers. They came from the area of Bomitaba, which is situated close to the Departmental capital Impfondo. Feeling as outsiders within the Djoubé's community they liked to visit me to converse about its otherness and about the functioning of the school.

Apart from these interviews, there were incidents and complaints of these teachers to the village chief that I witnessed – complaints about children's absences, requests for building parts of school buildings, etc., as well as individual complaints of Mbendjele children-pupils and their parents about the ORA practices.

Table 31 ORA data-collection summary

Method	**Frequency**	**Location**
Interviews	12	Djoubé
Observations – Attending Classes	6 days / 24hours	
Incidents & Conflicts (absenteeism)	11	

Perspective of ORA instructors

On Attendance. In most cases, organisers of such projects report problems in flexibility with Pygmy semi-nomadic lifestyle, which makes children dropping school for longer periods of time. In their annual report from 2013, UNICEF explicitly acknowledged the necessity of changing the curriculum in harmony with Yaka semi-nomadic: *"The ORA school assessment indicated that UNICEF should not confine itself to that model alone and recommended that it should explore alternative strategies (mobile or seasonal schools) more suited to the children's way of life."* (UNICEF 2013: 6). However, their

action plan for education in Congo in 2015-2025 does not mention it again (UNICEF 2015b). In his research of ORA schools in a Baka community, Kamei (2001) suggests that inflexibility with semi-nomadism is only one of the reasons for non-attendance. He further lists physical distance, psychological distance, language, economy, values and nomadic way of life (see also Pyhälä 2012).

In the unpublished manuscript derived from formation conference of ORA instructors in Sangha and Likouala, the authors indicate several reasons for Mbendjele children failing from attending the school. The authors of this publications do not indicate whether these reasons were indicated by Mbendjele or by the ORA teachers themselves. Thus, it is difficult to claim what are the real causes of children's absences. However, several conclusions can be drawn from the way these 'causes' were articulated in the text: Firstly, nomadic way of life is seen as something backwards, something worth not doing, 'as a heavy burden' to get rid of. Secondly, Mbendjele parents are not seen as fully capable of understanding the importance of ORA and the schooling in general.

According to the ORA teachers in Djoubé, the only way to guarantee children's attendance is to employ threats. One example is to say that policemen (*pòlísì*) will come to fetch the parents and imprison them (*pèspé*) if they do not force their children to come to school. One of two ORA teachers who worked in Djoubé during my fieldwork explained in detail how to develop these threats. In the example which follows, the teacher explains what to do about a child who has left school for the forest, and has not come back for a long time:

> ***[…] Maintenant, pour que la manière pour qu'il vient, il faut faire l'intimidation à son père – à son père.***
> 'Now, the way to make him (the child) to come, it is necessary to intimidate his father – his father.'
>
> ***Vous fêtes une convocation – vous n'écrivez pas !***
> 'You do a convocation – you do not write!'
>
> ***Vous envoyez un grand couteau comme ça, qui représente comme une lettre.***
> 'You send a knife big like this, which represents a letter.'
> [indicating how big the knife should be – about the size of a kitchen knife]
>
> ***Tu donnes à un Autochtone qui va là-bas – en forêt.***
> 'You give to one Autochthone who goes there – to the forest.'
>
> ***Tu lui dis : « Vas donner le couteau à ce monsieur-là. Vas lui dire les professeurs ont besoin de toi. »***

'You tell him: "You are going to give this knife to this mister. You are going to tell him professors need you."'

C'est à dire – le couteau là c'est la présence de nous.
'That is to say – that knife is (representing) our presence.'

Le couteau c'est le kúbúj.
'The knife is the object for negative magical practices.'

C'est la présence des professeurs. […]
'It is presence of the professors.'

Le couteau dans le [la] coutume ça explique que le message est de trop* urgence.
'Knife explains that the message is very urgent in our custom.'
**trop is used intelligibly with trés*

Il faut que tu sortes.
'It is necessary that you leave.'

De que tu reçois le couteau, il faut sortir.
'Because you get the knife, it is necessary to leave.'

Après vous inventez une [FR:un] mensonge.
'Then you invent a lie.'

Vous inventez une [FR:un] mensonge.
'You invent a lie.'

La politique !
'The politics!'

Tu faire [FR:fais] comprendre les Autochtones – il faut faire montrer l'objet comme ça. L'objet.
'You make the Autochthones understand – it is necessary to show them object like that. The object.'

C'est que il [FR:qu'il] vas connais [FR:connaître].
'It's that he is going to understand.'

Si il [FR:s'il] voit c'est avec la bouche, il voit que c'est pas la vérité.
'If he sees that it's just talking, he sees that it is not truth.'

Il faut faire le démonstraction [FR:la.démonstration]!
'It is necessary to make a demonstration!'

Une lettre !
'A letter!'

Quand tu lui montres une lettre et c'est caché [FR:estampillé] avec le cachet rouge, tu inventes une signature, vous inventez une [FR:un] mensonge de n'importe quoi…
'If you show him a letter and it's stamped with red stamp, you invent a signature, you invent lie about whatever…'

Vous-même le professeur – vous écrivez : « Ça c'est la direction de la police Thanry pour son enfant qui est dans la forêt, qui ne veut pas faire l'école. Donc, on a besoin de son père, pour qu'il fait la prison a la place de son fils. »
'Yourself, the professor – you write: "It is the police headquarters from Thanry in respect to the child in the forest, who doesn't want to attend the school. Thus, we have need of his father so he goes to the prison for his son."'* See Figure 2. Thanry is the closest village to Djoubé where state officials such as gendarmerie, police and immigration office have a permanent presence.

Autochtone – il a peur de faire la prison. […]
'Autochthone – he is scared of going to prison.'

Après, il va être convaincu.
'Then, he is going to be convinced.'

The teacher explained how threatening works. He offered his opinion about what the Mbendjele think about Bilo – that Mbendjele distrust Bilo's verbal threats. This is consistent with the claim mentioned in the introductory chapter about interethnic stereotypes: Mbendjele believe that Bilo have "big mouths" – they talk a lot, but fail to live up to their words. However, the teacher knew about one more powerful tool – a threat of sorcery to guarantee presence. And again, this is consistent with the Mbendjele stereotypes about the Bilo – Bilo are believed to be powerful in witchcraft and can harm Mbendjele. Together with involving "Congolese officials" into this threat, this sort of "politics" elicits fear and, consequently, forces Mbendjele to leave the forest and return to the village. Threatening as a method to guarantee children's presence was not advised in any written manuals for ORA teachers. According to this teacher, threatening was suggested verbally during the ORA teachers training.

Perceptions on Mbendjele parents. ORA instructors prefer not to inform the Mbendjele parents about the performance of their children. It is because Mbendjele parents are not understood as capable of understanding. There is also additional reason for not informing the Mbendjele parents – fear that the number of absences would rise quickly. This is a hypothetical example explained by the ORA instructor about how to speak with the parents about children's results. After the final exams when some children fail and some pass the exams, the teachers call the parents for a meeting:

Un Autochtone, il peut prendre son enfant et aller en forêt pour toujours.
'An Autochthone, he can (just) take his child and go to the forest forever.'

Il n'a pas aussi besoin de l'école.
'He isn't in need of the school.'

Donc, il faut pas [FR:il.ne.faut.pas] les dire la vérité. […]
'Thus, it is not necessary to tell them the truth.'

Il faut pas [FR:il.ne.faut.pas] faire montrer aux Autochtones que les enfants là sont échoues.
'It isn't necessary to show to the Autochthones that those children there failed.'

Ils vont fuir l'école.
'They will escape the school.'

Et le parent va fâcher que : « Mon enfant parts tous les jours à l'école. Pour quoi il est échoué ?
'And the parent will get upset: "My child goes to school every day. Why did he fail?"

Il va dire : « Je prends mon enfant il va plus partir à l'école. »
'He will say: "I take my child he won't go to school anymore."'

The excerpt of my conversation with the ORA instructors shows that Mbendjele parents are not seen as capable of understanding that a child can pass or fail the exams, so it is better to say that everyone passed:

Vous les donnez les cadeaux et les habilles.
'You give them gifts and clothes.'

Vous trouvez les biscuits, les bonbons pour les donner aux autres qui sont resté pour les mostiver [FR:motiver]. […]
'You find the biscuits, sweets to give them to those who stayed [failed the exams to pass to 'superior' class] for motivation.'

Vous appelez maintenant les hommes. […]
'Now, you call the people.'

Vous donnez – é ?
'You give [the gifts] – yes?'

« Vraiment, les enfants – ils ont bien travaillé, il y a pas [FR:il.n'y.a.pas] de difficulté. »
"Really, children – they worked well, there are no difficulties."

Vous les traitez dans l'égalité.
'You treat them equally.'

Vous fermez seulement là – les mensonges, pour que parent ne savait pas.
'You finish just there – lies, so that the parents don't know.'

Parce que quand il y a en enfant échoué il se décourage directement.
'Because when there is a child who failed, he gets discouraged quickly.'

Mbendjele and ORA

Children reasons for liking and disliking the school

In general, children disliked attending ORA school and some of them hid or ran further to the forest to avoid it. Parents knew about these behaviours, but in agreement with the concept of individual autonomy, they respected children's decisions. However, not all children detested attending this school. Contrary, some children enjoyed attending the school as they were self-motivated in learning reading and writing. This small group of children was dreaming of going to Impfondo one day. Impfondo is a capital city of Likouala Department. All ORA schools have 'basis' there. Children were promised to attend a secondary school (ORA 2) in Impfondo after completing ORA 1 in Djoubé. Some children were excited about the travel, visiting the city and finding a future spouse there.

Another reason for enjoying the school was a promise of receiving food at the end of each school day. The ORA teachers were waiting for the arrival of representatives of IPHD, a non-governmental organisation that initiated a project called School Lunch Program. They delivered to 150,000 children in Congo, 1300 Yaka (UNICEF 2015b: 54). Similarly, UNICEF in cooperation with United Kingdom National Committee provided access to purified water in some villages in Likouala, but not in Djoubé (UNICEF 2014: 34). While waiting for the School Lunch Program to initiate, ORA instructors demanded help from people from Djoubé. And some Bilo from the village provided crops to feed the children and supported ORA. However, these were just irregular supplies. At the beginning, children were excited about getting food at the school. And that was also one of the motivations for attendance. Mbendjele parents raised concerns of the feeding. Not that the food would be normally "served" to children often. But, if being in the forest, children can find foods independently from adults and provision for themselves, till the main, evening meal is served. Similarly, in the village, they could easily find palm nuts, which were simply roasted on the fire. Thus, staying half-day in the school meant that some children were hungry. The concern of their children hunger was highlighted by their parents.

ORA imitation games – children's copying strategy

Mbendjele children have their ways of coping with being forced to do something they do not want to do. After coming back from the school, children often played games including imitating and mocking teachers' behaviours and manners of their talking. This is not an alien way how to cope with things one despises. Mbendjele adults employ similar strategies to relieve the stress from dealing with Bilo – imitating, mocking, laughing, and re-enacting Bilo's behaviours, as I have described in *coalitionary mòádʒò*.

Here I present one example of this sort of mocking imitative game. This event took place in the afternoon after children came back from the school. They played under the cocoa trees. One was teacher and others were pupils. The role of the teacher rotated among the children, so everyone could enjoy being in the role of the teacher at least for a while:

> While hitting the 'table' (a drum in this case) with the pointing stick, *Mbɔ́lɔ́* shouts in deeper than usual voice:
>
> *"Bonjour!"* (sounds rather as *"bòndʒúr"*)
>
> (*Mbɔ́lɔ́* hits the table with stick.)
>
> Children reply in synchrony:
>
> *"Bonjour!"*
>
> (*Mbɔ́lɔ́* hits the table with stick)
>
> *"Comment t'appelles-tu?"*
>
> (*Mbɔ́lɔ́* hits the table with stick)
>
> Nobody answers.
>
> (*Mbɔ́lɔ́* hits the table with stick)
>
> (*Mbɔ́lɔ́* hits the table with stick)
>
> (*Mbɔ́lɔ́* hits the table with stick)
>
> *Mòsáŋgì* laughs louder than others.
>
> (*Mbɔ́lɔ́* hits the drum with stick faster three times)
>
> *Mbɔ́lɔ́* points at *Mòsáŋgì* with the stick and cries:
>
> *"Comment t'appelles-tu?"*
>
> *Mòsáŋgì* laughs.
>
> *Mbɔ́lɔ́* pretends to get upset and points the stick at *Mòsáŋgì* again:

"Comment t'appelles-tu?"

Mòsáŋgì giggles.

Mbɔ́lɔ́ raises the stick as if going to hit *Mòsáŋgì.*

Mòsáŋgì in shy and low voice:

"Je m'appelle Mòsáŋgì."

(her voice at the end was low, one can hardly hear what she says)

Others laugh.

Mbɔ́lɔ́ does not hesitate, continues the lessons, as if hurried:

(pointing with the stick at the trunk of the nearest tree – a blackboard as if there would be written 'A'):

"Á!"

Children reply in synchrony:

"Á!"

Mbɔ́lɔ́:

"Á!"

Children:

"Á!"

Mbɔ́lɔ́ (speeding up):

"Á!"

Children (matching *Mbɔ́lɔ́*'s speed):

"Á!"

Mbɔ́lɔ́ (attempting to shout faster):

"Á!"

Children laugh, *Mbɔ́lɔ́,* too.

They all start to sing a monophonic school song in Lingala language.

Interethnic relations

ORA's ideology is based on positive discrimination of Pygmy children – while Mbendjele can attend the school free of charge, Bilo could attend only after paying a fee. The proposed ORA ratio was one Milo to ten Mbendjele children (1:10). Racism is eliminated through putting children of different races in such a social setting, which gives them a feeling of equality. As Paul Bloom summarised in his book about the

morality of children: *Just babies: The Origins of Good and Evil* (2013; ebook): "[…] when people are of equal status, working toward a common goal, interactions between individuals often reduce prejudice. […] Parents are being reasonable, then, when they try to extinguish racism in their children by putting them in racially diverse schools — since, under the right conditions of contact, the children will expand their moral circles to include members of other races." ORA eliminates the education to Bilo.

Bilo parents preferred their children to attend a Congolese public school, also situated in Djoubé. They despised their children to attend the same school as Mbendjele did. They admitted the fear that their children would actually not progress in reading and writing and that they would take on the 'manners of the Mbendjele children', understood as backwards and animal-like. Similar attitudes were expressed by the Mbendjele. They welcomed the idea of only-Mbendjele schooling.

At the time of my fieldwork, there were only two sons of one Milo family who sat separately from the group of Mbendjele children, and with minimal interactions. During the break when children are expected to play and move freely within the school property, children played separately, or the Bilo children sat behind their desk.

If one of the main goals of the ORA is to prepare Mbendjele children for public schools, it lacks taking into account Mbendjele-Bilo relations. In public schools, the number of Bilo children is far greater than the number of Mbendjele children. As indicated several times throughout this thesis, Mbendjele and Bilo maintain complex, often negative relations. How would Mbendjele children deal with Bilo in public schools, if Bilo are not present in ORA schools? In other words, if Mbendjele children do not practice how to deal with Bilo in ORA, how could they be prepared for a public school?

One of the things that I have mentioned before was that the Mbendjele parents publicly shame Bilo children in absence of their Bilo parents. Mbendjele children would not have such support in public schools, where children have to face their issues alone. If Mbendjele are in minority in public school, how should they face oppression, harassment, and bullying. Another issue of concern is in what way Mbendjele children educate about how to behave in respect to Bilo. As I indicated in the chapter about *mòádʒò*, children are expected to claim pity, always agree, and avoid the eye contact.

ORA is un-growing people: Contrasting ORA Teaching Practices with the Mbendjele view on ripening

Promoting Boastfulness and Competitiveness. In my conversations with ORA instructors, they emphasised that the most intelligent pupils are those who answer their questions amongst the first. Those who show that they know the answer to the instructor's question first, are also rewarded with a praise. This encourages competition amongst the children and also promotes boastfulness. However, "Showing what you know" behaviour is understood as "rude" from the Mbendjele cultural perspective. Mbendjele adults try to shun boastful behaviour in children, as was the case of orphaned *Bémbà* in the chapter of *Mòsámbò*. This can be very confusing for the children – while Mbendjele parents do not wish their children to be boastful, ORA teachers present it as a good quality, require it from them, and even reward the children for such behaviour.

Polyphonic singing is understood as a form of disorder. Pygmy interlocking hocketing polyphonic singing key to Yaka identity (Lewis 2012). One of the key features of Mbendjele polyphonies is: *"no hierarchy among singers, anyone can stop and start the song, no authority organizes participation. If too many sing the same part the polyphony dissolves. Each singer has to hold their own, while being in harmony with those around them."* (ibid: 100). Thus, polyphonic singing promotes respecting individual originality by giving opportunity to each person for unique expression and freedom to join in, or leave. Singing "your own way" (*nà ndéŋgé àŋgwí*) is one of the most important principles for Mbendjele in singing. I was scold multiple times by Mbendjele women when I failed to sing my own way:

Díká	***lɛ́mb-à***	***ndéŋgɛ́***	***mɔ̀tí***	***námú!***
stop.IMP	sing-PRS	5.way	one	1SG

'Stop singing the same way as I do!'

Unfortunately, this is another issue that ORA teachers failed to recognise. From the perspective of the ORA teacher that I spoke with, polyphonic singing was 'messy' and improper – singing the Mbendjele way makes one difficult to understand what one is singing about, as others sing different things, at the same time as others do. Therefore, children were required to sing 'correctly', which means monotonously. Implicitly, this attitude promotes hierarchism: *"the greater the degree of acculturation to farmer and village lifestyles the less frequent is yodelled polyphonic music."* (Lewis 2014b: 81).

Children are punished for disobedience. Ethnographers reported that corporal punishment is very rare amongst Mbendjele and other Central African Pygmy groups (Boyette 2013: 109; Fouts et al. 2012: 128; Fouts & Lamb 2009: 394–395; Hewlett 1991a: 35; Kamei 2001). Beating a child can be even grounds for divorce (Hess et al. 2010: 334; Hewlett 1991a: 35). In the chapter of *How Humans Ripen* I have explained that children are seen as innocent, and as have been shown throughout wisdom-sharing practices within *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà*, children's personal autonomy is respected. Adults or others might give feedback to the child about his/her behaviours, but cannot punish them if they do not follow others' advice. Thus, in this respect ORA reminds farming or pastoralist societies, where punishment for disobedience is common.

Children's individual abilities are repeatedly compared. Mbendjele adults do not compare their children's abilities and knowledge by pointing the names of concrete individuals. For example, it is very *unlikely* for an Mbendjele and very common for the ORA teacher to say (in Lingala):

Yó	***ò***	***kóm-í***	***kìtókò***	***té!***
2SG	2SG	write-PRS	9.beauty	NEG

'You don't write beautifully!'

Èkóm-èlí	***yà***	***yé***	***è-zá***	***kìtókó!***
write-GER	POSS	3.SG	3SG-to.be	beautiful

'His/her (way of writing) is beautiful!'

On the other hand, Mbendjele do compare only in case referring to the groups of children. For example, because of common tensions between Mbendjele neighbourhoods in the village environment, people from one neighbourhood tend to complain about the other neighbourhood as of bad, not good, or of a poor quality. So, Mbendjele adults from one neighbourhood can say:

Bá-nà	***b-á***	***Ɔŋgɛ́lɛ́***	***bà-dìɛ́***	***nà***	***bò-tíyà.***
2-child	2-POSS	name.of.neighbourhood	3PL-be.PRS	with	14-rudeness

'Children from Ɔŋgélɛ are rude.'

Children are mocked when giving wrong answers. The cases of using ridicule employed by Mbendjele adults on children were exemplified in the chapter of *Mòádʒò*. ORA teachers employ mockery as well. However, in a different way. For example, teachers mention names to mock about children's performance. In *mòádʒò*, adults do not mention names when mocking someone. From an Mbendjele perspective, this would be correct only if the the ORA instructor would be a child – part of the children's groups. Mbendjele adults place importance on the act of participation, not on the *quality* of the participation. What matters is the very participation – employment of these skills (whether mediocre or excellent) for the good of the group. Proficiency in skills is child's individual issue, s/he is not forced to perform excellently. Thus, hypothetically, if the instructor knew these facts, s/he would mock children for their non-participation instead of judging the performance.

Children are asked to talk in contrast with the Mbendjele gender expectations. Mbendjele have culturally prescribed gender expectations about the speech style. *"Women's speech is more song-like than men's, and they accompany each other's utterances with sung expletives that contribute to increasing the volume and distinctive melodiousness of their conversations."* (Lewis 2014b: 91). As I have mentioned before, Mbendjele men value quietness. After entering *Èdʒéŋgì,* boys know that men should not talk too much – only Bilo and women talk too much and loudly – there are only certain domains where men speak loud, at that occurs through *mòsámbò*. After returning from schools, boys often complained that the ORA teachers ask them to talk as much as only women or Milo do.

Final Remarks

This chapter presented some contrasts of the Mbendjele concept of "ripening" with educational practices of the outsider-imposed ORA school. During colonial period, the outsider-imposed schools were for the "elites" solely. As a consequence, Mbendjele were not "seen" by the educational and national programs only until recently. Even though the impacts of ORA school in Djoubé can be properly evaluated only after a longer period of time, in this chapter, I have hinted on several issues concerning ORA practices that clash with Mbendjele cultural values of ripening. Admittedly, the above-mentioned opinions of ORA instructors could have been just personal opinions, in-applicable to discuss ORA schools in general.

Anthropologists, conservationists, social workers, health workers, and activists fight on behalf of the communities who are directly influenced by outsider-imposed phenomena, such as road-building, deforestation, etc. They argue for the necessity of free prior consent of local population in taking decisions about these actions occurring on their land. They acknowledge the importance of suiting such projects to local communities, but often, within their published materials, the "voices" of those people and those communities are rarely heard (ACHPR & IWGIA 2011: 86).

As I have shown, ORA is training for accepting hierarchy, competition and unequal outcomes: ORA is training Mbendjele children to be "on time", doing what the teacher says even when it is pointless; accepting punishment for disrespecting authority; competing with those around – marking work and rewarding the highest marks, and punishing the low marks, etc. Distinct Mbendjele values, as for instance in respect to polyphony, are devaluated and represented as "messy". In other words, ORA inculcates a system of values that is profoundly different from the Mbendjele view on people's ripening – ORA promotes hierarchy, boastfulness, competition, ranking based on children's academic skills. From an Mbendjele ripening perspective, all such practices promote children's emptiness and rotting.

10 CONCLUSION

This section concerns three different types of reflections upon the results and main messages of this thesis. The first part discusses contributions to understanding Mbendjele processes and modes of social learning. The second part covers areas that recurred mostly implicitly throughout this thesis. The third part condenses the essentials of each of the chapters. This chapter also includes limitations of the study and mediations on future research possibilities about the issues that I have hinted on, but not developed them to my scholarly satisfaction. These are dispersed through the chapter in respect to a particular issue in discussion.

PART ONE – DISCUSSING SOCIAL LEARNING

This is the first study that focuses on indigenous views on social learning concerning hunter-gatherers of the Congo Basin. The major contribution of this study is in its linguistically-informed, in-depth descriptive approach to social learning processes. It is also the first study to use metaphor-informed ethnography to describe social learning processes in hunter-gatherers.

The following presents a summary of main findings. Firstly, I will summarise the Mbendjele representations of social learning. Secondly, I will asses how this thesis contributes to the current debates of social learning.

Mbendjele views on social learning

Children are capable of learning. In contrast with Village Learning Model that understand children as " uneducable" (2010a: 153–4), Mbendjele understand children as "educable", possessing sense, and capable of learning and teaching.

Autonomy in learning. There is an explicit emphasis on the importance of respecting autonomy in individual's learning decisions – one is free to decide what specific knowledge to be interested in, and in what specific domains to specialise in. Individual differences (*kàkwí*) in these choices are expected and they are not being judged, even if for example someone decides not to specialise in anything. "People Ripen in Their Own

Ways" and "Guardians of Specialisations" emphasise the role of conscious restraint from interfering into child's learning decisions or speed – *Nìèlèké* scolded me for pushing *Sɔ̀ngɔ̀* into learning to weave a specific type of basket, and *Mbúmà* explained that each child is different, and some learns quickly and some learns slowly and that one should not interfere with it by "letting the child be". This is consistent with the Aka whose egalitarian and autonomous society makes people "unlikely to initiate, direct or intervene in a child's social learning." (Hewlett et al. 2011a: 1173).

Teaching can be harmful. Violations of egalitarian relations and failure to respect personal autonomy in learning and teaching can be harmful. This includes forcing others to teach, or forcing others to learn too quickly, or teaching "too much of knowledge" to someone who is not ready. These actions are harmful and impact the individual even on a physical level (e.g. by falling sick).

Acknowledgement of different social learning processes. Mbendjele interpretations about how people learn and teach show that they recognise a wide arrange of social learning processes: observation, participation, learning by doing, repetition, demonstration, verbal explanation, different forms of positive and negative feedback, and commands.

Emic terms of learning. Mbendjele distinguish types of social learning processes for acquisition of different types of knowledge or skill: to enter– secret knowledge (e.g. rituals and healing); to accompany– anything related to the ethno-ecological knowledge (e.g. fauna and flora of the forest or garden, way-finding information); to show– crafts (basket and mat-making, crafts, playing musical instruments, using tools), to explain – social institutions, conflicts, creation myth, differences between humans and animals, between women and men.

Importance of group. Mbendjele emphasize importance of community in social learning processes. *Mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà* are valued as important venues for cultural reproduction processes to be acted out. Though in each case differently, all three institutions are community events during which *group* interacts with itself. Informants' explicit emphasis on importance of these communal activities shows how highly individualistic culture that values personal autonomy acknowledges that one should not forget about belonging to the group.

The role of guardianship in specialisations. Specialisations in various domains of knowledge or skill are seen in terms of a guardianship role. Mbendjele emphasize that the individuals' specialised knowledge is a "thing to be looked after" (*èkóndʒà*), available to be shared with other members of the community. This is consistent with the Aka: *"Sharing and giving are also forager core values, so what an individual knows is open and available to everyone; if a child wants to learn something, others are obliged to share the knowledge or skill."* (Hewlett et al. 2011a: 1173). Further, this prevents from individuals' claiming authority over the knowledge or skill and reflects on the Mbendjele egalitarian ethos. However, obligation to share a knowledge or a skill can vary depending on what type of knowledge or skill an individual want to learn:

Inclusion/exclusion. While most of the cultural knowledge and skills are available to children, certain domains are fully and collaboratively controlled – by the initiated ones in terms of key religious rituals of *Èdʒéŋgì* and *Íŋgòkú* and by individuals with specialised knowledge which is related to religious practices (e.g. healers).

Participation. Mbendjele explicitly emphasise the importance of participation in desirable activities. It is important to keep encouraging for participation (*mpìá*) in the most desired activities – *màssánà* events.

Feedback & noise. Those children who engage in the most desirable activities such as *màssánà* should be praised (*kàná mòɲɔ̀ŋgɔ̀*), and those who engage in something disapproving, should also receive a feedback about the wrongness of their actions. While such extreme measures as corporal punishment is proscribed, people should give feedback by sharing a *màsámbò* speech, address the issue through *màádʒò* mockery, or use the means of verbal explanation (*sápwòlá*). Giving feedback on people's wrongdoings is motivated by the ideology of noise that has negative impact on every other member of the group (see the section Reflections on Noise in this chapter for detailed descriptions of noise and its impacts).

Contribution to the Debates on Social Learning Processes

Teaching

This thesis contributes to the debate of existence of teaching in small-scale societies – teaching does exist in an Mbendjele society, which corroborates with other studies concerned with teaching in hunter-gatherers (Boyette & Hewlett 2017b; Garfield et al. 2016; Hewlett & Roulette 2016; Lew-Levy, Lavi, et al. 2017; Lew-Levy, Reckin, et al. 2017). The following presents a discussion on teaching styles employed by Mbendjele.

Repetition. The ethnographic descriptions of teaching through *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà* show that repetition is an important mode of the Mbendjele social learning processes. This is not a novel observation, at least in terms of understanding social learning through *màssánà.* Lewis (2016; see also Oloa Biloa 2016) emphasised the role of repetition in inculcation of a distinct Mbendjele aesthetics through means of *màssánà.* Similarly, in *mòádʒò*, the performance is *repeatedly* re-enacted to deliver the message to the wrongdoer(s) and others present. While these are instances of repetitions that involve actions of the body, this thesis also shows that repetition of verbal statements of what is "good" and what is "bad" plays an important role in social learning – in *mòsámbò*, the speaker keeps repeating the key message that needs to be heard. Repetition as an important means of knowledge and skill acquisition was also explicitly acknowledged by my informants (see Table 8). The understanding of the role of repetition in social learning deserves more scholarly attention.

(Non-)interference or (non-)intervention. Scholars emphasized a laissez-faire attitude within the relationships among adults and children in hunter-gatherer societies (Bird-David 2005; Blurton Jones & Konner 1976; Hewlett & Cavalli-Sforza 1986; Kamei 2001; Sonoda 2014) and suggested that non-interference or non-intervention might play an important role in teaching personal autonomy (Lew-Levy, Lavi, et al. 2017: 26–27; Sonoda 2014, 2016a, 2016b).

While the importance of respecting personal autonomy in learning was highlighted by my informants, the institutions that they recommended as proper venues for social learning (of *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà*) often stand in an opposition to individual

autonomy. Through these institutions people *intervene* and *interfere* to others' lives, decisions, actions of others etc. Lewis observed this in terms of *massana*:

> "The marked tendency towards individualism and personal autonomy in many Mbendjele activities is counterbalanced by the fun and enjoyment of *massana* and the stress on the efficacy of such community action. The opposition between personal autonomy and community is the central dynamic animating much social interaction among Yaka people […] *Massana* is an important arena for negotiating between these seemingly contradictory forces that simultaneously endows both personal autonomy and community with value." (Lewis 2002: 171).

The relation between autonomy and intervention/interference in social learning should receive more attention. Restraining to interfere/to teach can be domain specific. Hunter-gatherer literature is replete with examples of non-interference if an infant plays with dangerous objects (see David F. Lancy 2016b for examples), but in what other contexts this takes place and why? Is interference more likely in the case of religion and social norms and values (such as in *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà*)? Is non-interference more likely in domains of subsistence knowledge and skills (Naveh 2016)?

Evaluative feedback. In her cross-discipline analysis of teaching, Kline suggests that evaluative feedback might be particularly common for teaching opaque social norms and values, in the contexts when *"the pupil either over- or under-uses a behavior"* (Kline 2015: 8). *Mòsámbò* does just that. The ethnographic vignettes suggest that speakers are often more concerned about the consequences of the actions than about the actions themselves – such as in the case of theft when the father did not criticise the act of stealing but the consequences of doing it ineffectively.

Negative feedback seems to be more common than positive feedback (celebratory *mòsámbò* was less common than a normative one), which corroborates with Boyette's observations of Aka (Boyette 2013: 100–101).

Boyette & Hewlett (2017b: 309) observed that *"ambiguous types of teaching such as negative feedback and teasing serve to encourage individual learning about social norms and values."*. What is special about the feedback given through *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà* is its *public* nature, and hence its ability to encourage not an

individual in concern only, but all others present. And others' presence is encouraged in these communal events.

An important form of evaluative feedback were people's commentaries or interjections during *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà*. They can take on a form of approving or disapproving sounds. During *mòádʒò* and *màssánà* people mostly interject the performances in a positive way. Hewlett & Roulette (2016: 11) study of Aka teaching infants also observed that positive feedback was mostly employed in the contexts of singing and dancing.

Children, thus, are surrounded by a wide range of opinions. Interestingly, teaching occurring through *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà* did not employ giving feedback on people's subsistence skills. In one case, for example I provide an ethnographic vignette concerning "lack of participation in economic production" – even though the *mòsámbò* speech concerns subsistence activities it is rather about the breached norm – about not helping others and about the importance of cooperation. This is also consistent with the recent review of ethnographic and observational studies of teaching in hunter-gatherers – feedback through *mòsámbò* and mòádʒò primarily concerns social norms and values (Boyette & Hewlett 2017b: 309) .

Encouragements to act. In several places within this thesis I have suggested that encouragements for participation are common to draw attention of children. This was mostly seen in *màssánà.* For example, an exclamation *"Dance!"* Boyette and Hewlett (2017b) who conducted observational studies of Aka forager and Ngandu farmer children call these exclamations "commands": *"this form of teaching involved a verbal directive, usually to do small tasks but also at times to perform subsistence work, share or become involved in social activities."* (Boyette & Hewlett 2017b: 306). These authors found that commands were the most frequent form of teaching employed (Boyette 2013: 100; Boyette & Hewlett 2017a). I prefer to use to call this type of teaching *"encouragements to act"* since one cannot coerce others in this egalitarian society. The expression of "commands" implies authority on behalf of those who issue them (even though one could argue that within an egalitarian society one does not have to comply to these commands).

An example of such encouragement to act was mentioned in the *Mòádʒò* chapter when two adult women asked the child to participate in the performance – asking him to cry – while not explaining *how* or other details as to what sort of crying is expected from him.

In contrast with child's participation in *mòádʒò*, what occurs within *màssánà* is that if the encouragement is followed, the child is immediately praised (as mentioned in the evaluative feedback section above). If *"Dance!"* is followed by the child's dancing, another exclamation follows: *"Joy!"* I have observed such *encouragement-and-praise* pairing only within the context of *màssánà.* This corroborates with the Mbendjele explicit statements on the desirability and crucial importance of *màssánà.*

(***Non)-verbal explanation.*** Instructive teaching might take place within *mòsámbò*, as the speaker can often explain what sorts of behaviours are bad and good. The way *mòsámbò* is designed, however, prevents from from violating egalitarian relations and personal autonomy. This is consistent with the Lewis' claim that direct teaching in a form of instruction would directly violate autonomous and egalitarian relations between the individuals.

Participation[20]

Because *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà* are not institutions designed for instruction, children's learning within these institutions is in Rogoff's terms intent participation: *"The purpose of the events is often carrying out the important business of the community and family life—although the presence and keen observation of learners may well be expected or encouraged."* (Rogoff 2003: 324).

Exclusion from participation. Lancy and Grove (2010a) mention that in certain traditional societies children are excluded from adult activities – seeing them as incapable of learning. While authors do not discus. Apart form the exclusion of un-initiated by initiated individuals, there is only one example of when exclusion from adult activities occurred. In the chapter of *mòádʒò* there is an example of a mother who left her daughter behind in the camp as she was too small to go that far yet. While some

[20] For further discussion on partipation see section "Fulness of Participation" within this chapter.

may argue that this is a case of exclusion from learning, this incident facilitated learning independence – that Mbendjele value so much.

Interesting contribution to understanding learning of social norms would be to look at children's *listening in* (Rogoff 2003: 326) or eavesdropping on adult conversations. Mbendjele children are not excluded from conversation about such topics as mating, sex, and gossip in general. This is for example seen in mòádʒò, when children can see women mocking men and their sexuality.

Contribution to the debates on modes of cultural transmission

The following section presents some observations on the modes of cultural transmission and seeks to answer the question of *from whom do children learn.*

Children's agency. Recent cross-cultural studies concerning hunter-gatherer learning suggest primacy of children playgroups in learning social and gender norms (Lew-Levy, Lavi, et al. 2017) and developing subsistence skills (Lew-Levy, Reckin, et al. 2017), transmission of local ecological knowledge (Gallois 2013, 2015), or sharing (Boyette 2013). While this thesis concerns primarily how adults teach children, or in other words, what role adutls play in children's learning, there are several important observations.

One particular example illustrates how older children adjusted a particular type of children's *màssánà* in order to include an infant in it. This example shows children's sensitivity to the infant's capabilities as as well as in more general terms, how children can teach children. A different example from mòádʒò points to the children's agency in teaching adults. This is particularly important in understanding social learning processes and the role of children in cultural reproduction. Further research on such children's agency is particularly important since children are "experts in learning" (Gallois et al. 2017; Hirschfeld 2002b).

Children's mòádʒò – children's culture? As Lawrence Hirschfeld emphasized, children's cultures are cultures of *"their* [children's] *own making, cultures that in significant measure are independent of and distinct from those of the adults with whom they live."* (Hirschfeld 2002b: 612) Given the fact that Mbendjele children spend much time together and that adults respect their personal autonomy, children have not only

possibilities to engage in activities according to their liking, but they are also given a "space" for developing different values as those of the adults.

Gallois et al. (2017) observed something similar about the Baka children in the domain of their ecological knowledge. While there were domains that were overlapping children's and adults' knowledge – for instance in terms of "gendered intracultural division of knowledge", there were also issues that were specific for the children. And that there is a gradual convergence of adults and children's knowledge as they grow up.

What we have seen in the case of *mòádʒò* within children's groups was that (unless something dangerous was about to happen) children among themselves were free to engage in *mòádʒò*, without adults' intervention. Only when children were mocking adults, these adults attempted to correct, adjust, criticise, or give feedback to their performances, both in relation to content and form. Such feedback can explain why children's *mòádʒò* differs from the performances of adults.

As Hirschfeld further puts it: *"*[…] *In making their own cultural traditions, children deploy singular conceptual skills that significantly constrain and mold not only their own cultural productions but also those of adults."* (Hirschfeld 2002: 612). Both *mòsámbò* and *mòádʒò* are "asking" people to conform to certain desirable behaviours. In the case of children's *mòádʒò*, however, we have seen that what is "desirable" can differ in the children's groups in comparison with the "adults". For example, children were mocking such behaviours that adults would see as inappropriate, children also mocked others' proficiencies in skills, which adults also avoid doing. Is this a case of "children's culture"? Following Hirschfeld's words, children's *mòádʒò* would be an example of such "moulded adult cultural production".

Children engage in diverse forms of mockery – including *mòádʒò* – amongst themselves as well as to ridicule adults. Adults' feedback on children's performances cultivates children's understandings of how appropriate adult *mòádʒò* should be performed, both technically and in terms of the content. One of the exampled mentioned above shows that children can also share wisdom with adults if they behave "unripe".

Mòsámbò* and *mòádʒò – a case of concerted transmission? Through *mòsámbò,* "one" speaks to "many". Analytically, thus, it could be seductive to associate it with one-to-

many pathway of cultural transmission, as identified by Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman (1981). One-to-many cultural transmission is likened to such contexts as when teacher instructs the class or when actor performs for an audience, as is common in the Western hierarchical cultures. "One-to-many" is considered as "the most rapid" cultural-transmission pathway. As Hewlett & Cavalli-Sforza (1986: 933) remarked in respect to cultural transmission of Aka society, this type of transmission is: *"very rarely if ever found, not surprising the relative egalitarian structure of pygmy society and the absence of schools."* I argue that because of its necessity to represent the group's interest, and because of collaborative and consensus-seeking *mɓáŋdʒò* speech preparation (as it takes place in *organizational mòsámbò* described above), *mòsámbò* reminds rather concerted transmission, where older members of the social group transmit to younger members of the group – a highly conservative mode of transmission that lowers variations of cultural variants, and hence decreases chances in cultural innovation.

A typical "concerted" cultural transmission is for example initiation to key cultural rituals. It is elders, or a group of adults and elders who join together in initiating individual youngsters. In their cross-cultural examination of cultural transmission in hunter-gatherers, Garfield et al. (2016: 32) found that mainly religious beliefs and practices are: *"often concerted in that many adults deliver a consensus cultural message; many initiation rituals fall into this category."* *Mòsámbò* addressed to children, show that concerted transmission can regard not only religious beliefs, but can also concern cultural norms and values – and perhaps in other egalitarian hunter-gatherers, too, given the lack of hierarchies, where group speak, and public negotiations and disputes occur, and children are not excluded from these events.

This is, however, only if "speaker-and-audience" interactions are taken into consideration. As I have highlighted at the beginning of this thesis, my analysis of *mòsámbò* regards it as a specific *context* of cultural transmission. Taking a stance of an individual child who acts as audience, it is not only the speech that s/he is listening to, it is the people's responses and opinions they share within the speech and the conversations and whispers (including non/verbal communication) they hold with each other while the speaker speaks, and the discussions that follow after *mòsámbò*. Thus, it is not only about the content of the speech that children or anyone present listens to, but also about acquiring the sense of what personal autonomy and egalitarianism is like –

people are free to agree and to disagree, to interject the speech, or to dismiss the speech it if the speaker is drunk, or start own *mòsámbò* after the speech.

Study Limitations

This thesis contributes to the anthropology of learning and cultural reproduction. By combining linguistic analysis and emic perspective this contribution is novel and innovative. However, there are at least two main limitations here. While the relationship with my key informant *Mbúmà* had many advantages – mainly in terms of her specific knowledge about rearing children – the time spent with her and other adult women led to underrepresentation of children and men.

Adult-bias. This study refers only marginally to the processes of social learning that occur horizontally, among peers as well this thesis does not discuss how children understand learning and teaching processes. This is not to disvalue the importance of children's groups in terms of social learning – such as collaborative learning, exploration, teaching, or play. In other words, this thesis does not claim that children's learning comes primarily from adults – only the scope of the thesis is narrowed to the interactions of adults and children.

Gender-bias. This thesis largely presents the female point view. The key informant was a female and most of the informants were females. This is mostly seen in the chapter of the *Human Life-Cycle* where female interpretations of *èkìlá* are largely discussed, but the male counter-part of *èkìlá*, *màténà*, is mentioned only briefly. Similarly, while the issues of motherhood were discussed, fatherhood was neglected.

PART TWO – OTHER OBSERVATIONS

On (Un)Ripeness

This thesis looked at the Mbendjele concept of "ripeness" from several points of view. The chapter *How Humans Ripen* exemplified on the basic terminology and the characteristics of discourse that concern human. Ripening is a gradual, highly individual process. As was seen in the chapter of *Mòádʒò*, children were mocking a man, who was "without intelligence" – yes, he was an old man, but he never reached "ripeness". Ripeness thus, is not necessarily expected to be achieved, and Mbendjele do not define as to *when* (for example in terms of age) people should be ripened already. As I have shown, ripeness is not defined by one's engaging in sex – even children do that. It is not defined by marriage – even unripe children can engage in "togetherness with" someone. It is not necessarily defined by giving birth to a child – even immature girls can get pregnant (especially under sorcery or in relationships with Bilo).

In the chapter of *Mbendjele Life-Cycle*, I have pointed out that through the prism of *èkìlá*, one's ripeness can be defined by one's independency from parents' *èkìlá* (s) – when no longer joint parental responsibilities are acutely necessary – when parents' improper actions have no longer impacts on their children. It is when the children's *èkìlá* is fully grown, and thus, the child is no longer a already ripened.

While people can help others – they can promote others' ripeness, they cannot coerce them to do so. Everyone ripens in her/his own way. And it is up to everyone to decide whether they choose to ripen, or they take on a journey that leads to their emptiness or rotting. As was seen in the in the chapters of *Mòsámbò*, *Mòádʒò*, and *Màssánà*, adults attempt to promote people's and children's ripeness in different ways. Through *mòsámbò,* speakers voice out loud how potential danger of emptiness can enter the camp, if people do not stop engaging in "bad" or pro-rotting actions. Through *mòádʒò*, people re-live those "bad" actions together to remind everyone, that those acts are silly and potentially noise-making. *Màssánà* promotes ripeness in profoundly different ways. *Màssánà* primarily focuses on the "the good" and puts emphasises on continuity of doing the good, delicious things to achieve ripeness.

Reflections on Noise

Despite the criticisms of Turnbull's work for his "overtly" romanticising image of the Mbuti, some of his claims recurred very strongly in my fieldsite – particularly, his repeated emphasis on "noise". Noises extend from "sounds" only. According to my informants, noise is nearly everything "bad" that people do or anything "bad" they get involved to, even unintentionally. It extends from what is known as unpleasant *"sound"* only. Even unspoken silent tensions are *noise*. Noise can be produced by all kinds of peoples' improper, or non-normative actions: e.g. cheating on your wife is noise, and nearly all children's mis-behaviours that I have "categorised" in the chapter of *Mòsámbò* are just different forms of noises. If taken this Mbendjele ideology of noise into my analysis of *mòsámbò*, I would not separate clumsy theft from sexual relations with Bilo, because from an Mbendjele view, they are both forms of noise.

Perhaps, the most powerful feature of this complex ideology is that it connects individuals who did *not* do anything bad with those who did, as well as with those who are innocent in this web of relations and suffer from others' improper actions *directly* – the children. I argue that the "noise" can explain why should someone un-related care for soothing child's cry and immediately respond by e.g. breastfeeding him/her.

In my observation, even visitors, who just stopped by in our camps, cared for soothing someone else's child's cry – thus, not necessarily friend's child or sister's child, but a "foreign" child. As I have shown in the chapter of *Mbendjele Life-Cycle*, *èkóndʒì* directly links parents and their actions with the wellbeing, health, and death of their children, and does not allow to mistreat or abandon them unless they want to be childless, unable to kill an animal, and be unhappy for the rest of their lives.

However, noise makes feel everyone other present, not just the parents, responsible for taking care of children who are not of their own. Of course, *èkóndʒì* ties these responsibilities much more strongly than "the noise". Unrelated person can simply leave and join a different group that does not produce noises, or friction from that part of the group that creates these noises.

If people decide to remain in the group, it is in everyone's personal, even selfish interest – and that can occur too – to make sure that the forest is open for food. After all, no one

wants to be hungry and fall sick. And no one wants children to be hungry, cry, and make everyone else hungry and fall sick. Whenever noise occurs, it brings a message that something is wrong and that something worse is about to come, if not ceased.

The noise links responsibilities of everyone present not only in terms of allomaternal nursing and soothing infant's cry. It accounts for promoting children's ripening, too. This was seen in *mòsámbò*, where the speakers were concerned about the children who were not necessarily of his/her own.

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As I have shown, *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò,* and *màssánà* present powerful venues for preventing noise, as well as to solve noises in non-noisy ways. While the clashes of interests and conflicts can be solved also by physical fights, or by beating a child to make him/her conform – these are all noisy forms of conflict-resolution that eventually make things more troublesome, as they bring in even more noise, and hence problems with the forest.

Each of these institutions operates in a different way to prevent or solve noisy issues. *Mòsámbò* does it through catharsis. By choosing to speak *mòsámbò* instead of getting in the fight, one can vent off his/her anger without creating further noise. As I have explained, through *mòsámbò*, people can insult the wrongdoers without provoking further aggression. Public speaking of *mòsámbò,* in other words, provides a context through which culturally accepted ways of insulting can occur. *Mòádʒò* operates in a different way as it is not the performer who seeks catharsis him/herself, but it is about putting pressure on an individual who created the tensions in the camp at the first place. In respect to noise, *màssánà* works in a very different way. While like *mòsámbò* and *mòádʒò,* it can also resolve the tensions within the community, "full" *màssánà* requires that tensions are already solved, and mostly celebrates already non-tensions atmosphere by stretching the joy of successful cooperation and non-noise further. *Màssánà* needs tensions between humans to be solved out, otherwise, it can turn into noise easily.

However, noise cannot be prevented or ceased successfully if people are not coordinated and do not engage in it collectively –everyone's "fullness" of participation within these institutions is necessary.

Fullness of Participation

Participation in *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà voluntary*. No one can coerce others to speak *mòsámbò*, to perform *mòádʒò*, or to take *màssánà*. No one can force on anyone else to listen to *mòsámbò*, to watch *mòádʒò*, or to dance, to sing, or to drum, if they do not wish to do so. If people do not share the wishes in participation with others, they should let others doing it and/or simply leave.

However, if people decide to stay present, their participation is expected – no matter if they are taking the role of (main) performers or the audience – they should try to give their best. Otherwise, the initial goals and the very purposes, the reasons why to do *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, or *màssánà* are not necessarily achieved. The coordination of the group as a whole is essential. It is better for everyone if that person who does not want to participate leaves instead of joins in half-heartedly and spoil the results.

There is no hierarchy between performers and the audience. The participation of main actors and the audience are equally valued – both are *required* for success in fulfilling the goals of each of these institutions:

The speaker's speech *solely* is not what *mòsámbò* makes *mòsámbò*. An "accomplished" speech is only such a one that involves full engagements of the speaker and the audience, too. The goal of *mòsámbò* is reached only when the speaker talks and people respond to it. Perhaps that is why the speaker keeps asking if people are listening. Also, it must be clear that the speaker is communicating with somebody, otherwise the speech would be ignored, ridiculed, or criticized (like drunken speeches, or shouting by people who are reportedly mentally unwell) – *mòsámbò* without addressee is not a *mòsámbò*, and *mòsámbò* which has addressee, but is not responded to at all, is an unsuccessful *mòsámbò*.

Similarly, for *mòádʒò* to be a success, participation of actors and audience is equally necessary. If *mòádʒò* does not reach others' attention – if people do not contribute with their laughter – it ends before reaching its goal –without tension-dissolution, without delivering a normative lesson. If it is only the performers who ridicule someone's silly or bad actions, and others do not participate, the person in target does not need to feel

that s/he did something wrong. If the audience does not react, it is as if they would agree with the wrong or silly-doer.

The strength and potency of *màssánà* also requires a full participation of everyone. *Mòkóndì* spirits would not come out from the forest if others would not engage fully in calling and luring them – if they do not sing, and dance the best they can. And if by any chance it happens so, such *màssánà* is more "empty" than "full", more "dry" than "juicy", and does not bring as much joy as it could. Such *màssánà* does not allow people to loose themselves in it, and thus, does not have a healing power neither is potent in communication with the forest and other beings living in it.

As I have shown in the chapters of *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà*, the quality of participation within these institution differs as people pass through life and at certain point, according to gender, too. This un-sameness of participation is valued equally and required for healthy outcomes. Most clearly and straightforwardly, it is seen during *màssánà* in polyphonic singing. As Lewis pointed out, if people begin to sing in the same way, polyphony dissolves.

Consolidation of Relations between Humans and Other Beings

While I have cited Bird-David's (2008) quote in nearly every discussion section of the chapters of this thesis, it is relevant again: hunter-gatherers do not value knowledge for their own sake, but they always situate it within the social relations to make these relations going. As I have shown, through *mòsámbò* and *mòádʒò,* people make sure that the relationships between *people* are "going", including Non-Mbendjele humans, such as Bilo or different outsiders. In this respect, *màssánà* profoundly differs from these institutions, as it concerns not only the relations between humans, but serves to solve tensions between humans, spirits, animals, and other beings, that are also living in the environment of the forest.

People are constantly aware of the fact that they are not the sole living beings co-sharing the forest. Each of these beings, whether it is an individual *Panda* tree, an owl, Bilo, or a European visitor passing by, they all have their own thinking, intentions, and goals that can come to agree with each other or clash with others' intentions, goals, and actions.

It is very important to make sure that the intentions at least between humans, are shared in order to prevent danger that rests upon menstruating girl from blood-eating spirits, or spirits that take children who wonder alone in the forest, or as I described in the chapter of *Màssánà* – owls-messengers of children's death. *Màssánà* helps in solving tensions between humans and other beings, but this tension-dissolution is successful only if the tensions among *humans* were already solved, for example through *mòsámbò* and *mòádʒò*.

PART THREE: SUMMARISING CHAPTERS

Chapter 4 – How Humans Ripen

This chapter presented some basic characteristics of Mbendjele concepts of "ripening". I have shown that the "life-stages" as people pass through life are recognised, but they are functionally-defined, overlapping and should not be regarded as "stages" in strict sense on the term. Person's development is very *individual* process. This individuality in development is crucial to understanding Mbendjele teaching and learning practices. Mbendjele value and respect children's own initiative in learning and exploring the world, including respecting their decisions in not attempting to learn anything. The role of adults is to let children know if their activities are very "bad", because they create noise and disrupt egalitarian relations, and hence the well-being of the group, as well as to let them know if their activities are extremely good, valuable, sweet, and delicious.

Chapter 5 – On Mbendjele Life-Cycle

This chapter looked at some ethnographic features of my informants' lives at different "life-stages". I have described how the ideology of èkìlá – *èkóndʒì* particularly – naturalises indulgent child care as well as how it informs one's maturity (ripeness). *èkóndʒì* strongly encourages both parents to take care of their children with love, otherwise they would threaten their own happiness and life-fulfilment. For women, bringing children into this world is the highest valued contribution, something that is spoken about with glee and pride. On the side of men, it is providing and contributing by killing animals and bringing the meat in. Of course, there are other gendered activities that are important. However, childbirth and hunting are the key ones. I have explained that both of these most valued aspects of men's and women's lives would be

threatened and even ruined, if they would not care for their children with love. If matena is *"ruined hunting success"*, equivalently *èkóndʒì* could be defined as *"ruined childbirth success".* Reflectively, this chapter offered mainly the women's (*èkóndʒì*) side of the problem, as most of my research was drawn from my interactions with women. Further research is needed to be done about matena – the male pole of the èkìlá and on how Mbendjele men see their lives, their hunting activities, and impacts of their actions on their wives and children.

Chapter 6, 7 & 8 – Mòsámbò, Mòádʒò & Màssánà

These chapters contributed to the understanding of Mbendjele-specific ways of teaching and learning. Mbendjele value community-ways of sharing wisdom, since each of the institutions involve communal activities and highlight the group participation. These chapters also contribute to the debate of "non-existence" of teaching. In more nuanced and Mbendjele-honest way expressed as "wisdom sharing", teaching does exist and is practiced by the Mbendjele.

Each of these institutions provides and constraints methods or ways or styles of these transmissions. In *mòsámbò*, children are taught by hearing voiced messages that they should learn about and from the conversations and commentaries others offer to validate or refuse speakers' lesson. In *mòádʒò*, actors transport people back to an occurring that should not remain unspoken or un-re-enacted about. Again, others present offer information on performer's validity in terms of their shared lessons.

Concerning the *styles* of sharing wisdom through these institutions, it seems that giving feedback and encouragements for participation are the most dominant ones. By giving feedback people do not violate egalitarian relations – since "feedback" does not carry with disrespect of one's personal autonomy –which is one of the most important "drives" of desirable ways of teaching and learning, as explained in the chapter *How Humans Ripen.*

This thesis explored just three Mbendjele institutions from a cultural transmission standpoint. There are many others that need to be explored to get more holistic picture of Mbendjele culturally-specific teaching and learning practices. For example, the *gossip* holds an important potency in teaching and learning about cultural norms, as

children are not excluded from people's gossiping. Another context to be explored are Mbendjele sang fables that combine the techniques of nearly every artistic sphere – singing, dancing, *mòsámbò*-like speeches, hypothetical conversations with wrong and silly-doers and tricksters, poetics, exaggerations, extreme repetitiveness and again, active participation of everyone present.

Chapter 9 – ORA Un-growing

Outsider-imposed school for Mbendjele in Djoubé is too "young" to evaluate its impacts on transmission of Mbendjele culture between generations. However, in this chapter I have raised some of the issues that manifest profound contradictions between the "philosophy" that guides the ORA formal schooling practices with the Mbendjele worldview of ripening. ORA can not only impact the children's knowledge of "numbers" of faunal or floral species, but it can crash on the most-appreciated and celebrated values with and for the forest, too. While my Mbendjele informants seem to show "immunity" to these outsider values, over a longer period of time, and if not communicating with the local Mbendjele communities, such outsider-imposed institutions can disrupt people's traditional perceptions on the world they live *in* and share *with* others – those traditional egalitarian values that people attempt to keep going, also through *mòsámbò*, *mòádʒò*, and *màssánà* institutions.

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